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This essay investigates the testamentary circulation of everyday objects in a small community of central Italy, Borgo San Sepolcro, between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, aiming to uncover its social, cultural, and gendered implications. Drawing on a corpus of last wills, it examines the movable goods that testators most frequently bequeathed and the multiple logics that guided their transmission. The analysis places this specific case in the context of recent debates in the social sciences on the diverse values of objects and their capacity to shape the social world.

Il saggio indaga la circolazione testamentaria degli oggetti d'uso quotidiano in una piccola comunità dell'Italia centrale, Borgo San Sepolcro, tra XIV e XV secolo, con l'obiettivo di metterne in luce le implicazioni sociali, culturali e di genere. Sulla base di un corpus di testamenti, si esaminano i beni materiali più frequentemente lasciati in eredità e le molteplici logiche che ne guidavano la trasmissione. L'analisi pone questo caso specifico in risonanza con i dibattiti più recenti nell'ambito delle scienze sociali sui compositi valori degli oggetti e la loro capacità di contribuire alla costruzione del sociale.

Middle Ages, 14th-15th centuries, central Italy, Borgo San Sepolcro, testamentary bequests, objects.

Medioevo, secoli XIV-XV, Italia centrale, Borgo San Sepolcro, lasciti testamentari, oggetti.

This essay draws on work initiated within the UKRI project *Art and Inequality in the Shadow of the Black Death* (https://www.artandinequality.com), directed by Samuel Cohn. There, I first assembled a corpus of devotional bequests intended for commissioned artworks and devotional objects. The Sansepolcro sample was later expanded and analysed within two research projects funded by the European Union: the NextGenerationEU MSCA Seal of Excellence project at the University of Padua, ThiMo – *Things in Motion: Material Practices in Late Medieval Households (Italy, 14th-15th Centuries)* (2024-25) and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie project *Things that Matter: Mobility and Agency of Everyday Objects in Late Medieval Italy* (2025-27) (Grant Agreement No. 101154204), both conducted at the University of Padua. I wish to thank Isabelle Chabot, Samuel Cohn and the anonymous reviewers for their careful reading and suggestions. I am also deeply grateful to Valentina Costantini, who shared with me many insightful reflections on these topics during our daily work side by side in the archives.

¡Cuántas cosas,
limas, umbrales, atlas, copas, clavos,
nos sirven como tácitos esclavos,
ciegas y extrañamente sigilosas!
Durarán más allá de nuestro olvido;
no sabrán nunca que nos hemos ido.
Las cosas, Jorge Luis Borges, 1969

1. *Introduction*

Late medieval societies were not object-saturated worlds like our own, but rather contexts in which individuals experienced a profound redefinition of their material horizons. Historiography on material practices and cultures identifies the spread of the Black Death as a decisive watershed. In the wake of the pandemic, relationships between people and their possessions began to change. New patterns of consumption and attitudes towards property emerged, and a broader, more socially diverse range of consumers entered the marketplace. As a result, material goods acquired novel roles and meanings within socio-cultural dynamics.[1] This contribution situates its analysis within this broader historical context. It explores how everyday objects operated within the social and emotional lives of men and women. As a case study, I will focus on testamentary circulation of objects in Borgo San Sepolcro (modern-day Sansepolcro), a small settlement in the Upper Tiber Valley that offers valuable documentation that has never been studied from this perspective. Deliberately, I move away from major urban centres that have dominated studies of consumption and material culture. Despite commercial links between cities and peripheral areas, the mobility of workers, and the circulation of technical and artisanal knowledge, the analysis starts from the premise that the material culture of late medieval societies had distinctly local features that cannot be overlooked. Scaling down to a single and intensively studied case can prove especially fruitful. The analysis of Borgo San Sepolcro will serve both as a lens on the local effects of broader phenomena and as an initial controlled setting to refine an operational methodology and collect evidence that can sustain future comparative work.

This study builds on a vibrant body of scholarship stimulated by the material turn and recently revitalised through fruitful cross-disciplinary exchanges. Within research on medieval Italy, attention to materiality is long-standing; more recent, however, is a shift from analysing objects in terms of use, function, and production techniques[2] to observing them as commodities and markers of socio-economic identity, with particular attention to luxury

[1] Crouzet-Pavan, *Une autre histoire de la Renaissance*; Cohn, "Renaissance Attachement to Things;" French, *Household Goods*; *Una nuova cultura del consumo?*
[2] This strand of research was developed primarily in the 1970s and 1980s. Exemplary works include Bresc-Bautier, Bresc, *Une maison des mots*, and Mazzi, Raveggi, *Gli uomini e le cose*.

goods.[3] In parallel, the biographical paradigm – drawn from Igor Kopytoff's seminal essay[4] – has become increasingly influential as a methodological tool for tracing the social life of artefacts, examining how they change over time and the uses, forms, and complex values they acquire throughout their life cycle.[5] A less developed theoretical approach – not only for medieval Italy – is the one that has emerged in the social and cognitive sciences, exploring the social and material agency of things. These studies propose a significant analytical shift: from human action to that of non-human entities that exert a specific transformative power on social relationships, and from relational networks composed of individuals to hybrid assemblages made up of humans and things.[6] Within medieval studies, cultural and art historians have been the ones to pursue this approach, focusing on the evocative and sensory agency of medieval sacred art and devotional objects.[7] I propose to extend this line of inquiry to a wider range of material goods in order to understand – historically – how the lives of objects intersect with those of men and women of different social standing. Firstly, I will analyse the dataset and the documentary sources on which this research is based and then the circumstances that set objects in motion, mapping how their circulation forged and reshaped social ties. Finally, I will turn to a select group of artefacts, tracing their material transformations and the actions they elicited.

[3] In the late 1990s Richard A. Goldthwaite's pioneering study drew attention to the consumption of luxury goods in Renaissance Italy: Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand*. Along the same lines of inquiry, see Jardine, *Worldly Goods*. More recently, Élisabeth Crouzet-Pavan has revisited the debate from a critical angle: Crouzet-Pavan, *Une autre histoire de la Renaissance*. See also Salerno, *Nel regno del lusso*.

[4] Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography."

[5] Important insights can be gained from the literature on credit networks, the reuse of objects, and the second-hand market: García Marsilla, "Introducción;" Meneghin, "Circular Economy;" Smail, *Legal Plunder*; Todeschini, *Seconda mano*. In Italy, further work in this vein includes the recent collected volume *Gli oggetti come merci*, as well as the following research project linking several Italian universities: PRIN 2022 ON – *Objects in Network. La social life degli oggetti nel XV secolo* (https://site.unibo.it/on/it), which recently published the proceedings of its final conference: Colesanti, Duranti, Ruzzin, *Oggetti scritti*. Significant developments on the subject come also from recent Spanish historiography: Almenar Fernández, Velasco Marta, Lafuente Gómez (coord.), *Objetos cotidianos*; García Marsilla (coord.), *Espacios de vidas*.

[6] The work of the philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour on the Actor-Network Theory has been instrumental in conceptualising non-human entities' agency and their roles in networks of relationships: Latour, *Reassembling the Social*. Another seminal study on material agency is Gell, *Art and Agency*. This theoretical debate has been particularly well-developed in archaeology: Jervis, *Pottery and Social life*; Knapett, Malafouris, *Material Agency*; Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind*.

[7] The art historian Zuleika Murat is currently conducting an ERC-funded project on this topic at the University of Padua (*SenSArt – The Sensous Appeal of the Holy. Sensory Agency of Sacred Art and Somatised Spiritual Experiences in Medieval Europe, 12th-15th century*). For a historical perspective on devotional objects through this theoretical lens: Long, "Memory and Materiality;" Long, "Immagini sacre, candele, borselli;" Bynum, *Dissimilar Similitudes*. A notable exception is Lisa Foroughi's work, which applies this framework to analyse testamentary bequests of middling-sort men in English rural communities: Foroughi, "From Christmas Candlesticks to Deathbeds." In a similar historiographical vein, Blanca Garì discusses the power of certain artefacts: Garì, *El poder del objeto*.

2. *The context and the documents: an overview*

Borgo San Sepolcro could not be considered a city in its own right due to the absence of an episcopal seat. Using a well-known category introduced by Giorgio Chittolini, it can be described as a "quasi città",[8] displaying demographic, social, and economic features that were typical of a city. During the last two centuries of the Middle Ages, its population ranged between 4,000 and 5,000, showing remarkable resilience in the face of several crisis: from waves of plague to the earthquakes of the 1350s, and the military conflicts of the early fifteenth century.[9] Its political history was also turbulent, marked by frequent changes in rule. Several lordships and nearby cities took turns controlling the territory until it definitively submitted to Florence in 1441.[10] From an economic point of view, Borgo's dynamism was principally tied to the production and trade of the woad, a plant used for dyeing. Its strategic location also played a key role, connecting inland Tuscany's major economic hubs with Adriatic ports, especially in the Marche, which gave it access to maritime trade.[11]

The material culture of this area remains largely unexplored. Except for the study of Maria Serena Mazzi and Sergio Raveggi on consumption among rural elites in the Florentine *contado* during the fifteenth-century, research into material culture in medieval Italy has focused on major luxury centres and their wealthiest inhabitants.[12] Yet, the documentation for investigating these topics from peripheral areas and among economically less privileged populations is not lacking. Among the available sources, last wills and testaments offer valuable insights into the material ecosystems of specific contexts.[13] It is now widely acknowledged that no single document can provide an exhaustive account of the material world of the past, as it is inevitably shaped by selective recording practices. Last wills are not an exception. Nevertheless, it is precisely this partiality that gives them analytical value. These

[8] Chittolini, "Quasi città." See also Salvestrini, "Proprietà fondiaria e gerarchie sociali," and Scharf, *Borgo San Sepolcro*. On small settlements in medieval Tuscany more generally, see Pinto, Pirillo (a cura di), *I centri minori*.

[9] Czortek, "Tra grande peste e giubileo." It appears that earthquakes struck the area in December 1352, January 1353, and January 1358.

[10] Pope Eugene IV pledged Sansepolcro for 25,000 ducats. On its social and political history: Czortek, "Alle origini del comune di Sansepolcro;" Czortek, "La formazione della coscienza cittadina;" Scharf, *Borgo San Sepolcro*.

[11] On Borgo's economy: Barlucchi, "I centri minori;" Franceschi, "Economia e società;" Pinto, "Borgo Sansepolcro."

[12] Mazzi, Raveggi, *Gli uomini e le cose*.

[13] Martha Howell's work on the transmission of movables and gift-giving in late medieval Douai is pioneering: Howell, *Commerce before Capitalism*, ch. 3, and Howell, "Fixing Movables." For the Italian peninsula, see the very recent contributions by Tosi Brandi, "Nelle mani delle donne;" and Zucchini, "Non solo stoffe." Interestingly, all of these studies focus on women's last will. I provide further bibliographical references on these topics throughout the rest of the article. More broadly, on the potential of testaments for the study of material culture, see Cohn, "Renaissance Attachment to Things," particularly 4-5.

documents shed light on the objects people valued and considered worth preserving and passing on to specific individuals. They enable us to observe the interaction between people and things. As we will discuss further, the trajectories of these movable objects can be interpreted as signs of emotional intentions and as deliberate memory strategies. In this sense, they provide avenues for exploring the emotional grammar of things: the affective meanings and values that ordinary objects could acquire, and the roles they could play within relational networks, reinforcing certain social bonds while weakening others.

The wills of the inhabitants of Borgo San Sepolcro used in this study are preserved in the State Archives of Florence within the *Notarile Antecosimiano* collection. The notaries active in this area produced substantial documentation. To extract a useful sample for analysis, I focused (though not exclusively) on notarial registers containing only testamentary acts. My observations are based on a sample of 506 wills drawn up between 1330 and 1465 from 315 men (62.25%) and 191 women (37.74%).[14] Of these, 123 (24.3% of the total) include at least one bequest of personal objects from the testator to members of their household or community, or to the poor, ecclesiastical institutions, confraternities or hospitals. Monetary donations intended for the commissioning liturgical objects (such as vestments, chalices, missals, censers, and candlesticks), or architectural and artistic works, have not been counted.[15] Including such gifts would have shifted the focus of the analysis away from its central concern: the choices by men and women that determined the future lives of their wordly goods. However, I have considered bequests involving objects intended for sale to fund commemorative projects and acts of piety. A notable example is that of Clarucia di Giovanni, widow of Pietro (1362), who listed the possessions she wished to be sold and specified how the proceeds were to be allocated. Four hand towels, one tablecloth, and a pair of light blue woollen drapes were to benefit her soul in accordance with her heirs' wishes; her belt and purse were to support the construction of the San Francesco church; and all her buttons – *omnes suos bottones* – to subsidize a pilgrimage to Rome.[16] Despite these goods soon to vanish in sales, Clarucia had carefully considered how each of her belongings should be used.

Male testators (76; 24.12%) made object-related bequests slightly more frequently than women (40; 21.39%). However, the wills of women – most of whom were widows[17] – tended to be more elaborate. On average, they distrib-

[14] Here are the notarial protocols I consulted: Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASFi), *Notarile antecosimiano*, 253, 298, 2263; 4115; 6361; 6866; 7001; 7046; 16187; 19282.

[15] This line of inquiry is currently being developed as part of the UKRI-funded collective project *Art and Inequality in the Shadow of the Black Death* directed by Samuel Cohn at the University of Glasgow.

[16] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 16187 (09/07/1362), c. 142r.

[17] Widows account for 76.32% of the women recorded in the overall sample. A nearly identical proportion appears in the subset comprising only wills with bequests of objects, where married women constitute just a quarter of the total.

uted their movable property among a larger number of recipients, designating 70.68% more beneficiaries than men did. To explain these patterns, it is important to understand how these bequests were related to the designation of the universal heir and, more broadly, how they were situated within the life course of these women. As has been observed in other contexts, women's last wills often strike a balance between familial and social expectations and personal initiative.[18] In several cities across northern and central Italy, inheritance systems and the social norms regulating property circulation were both shaped by and contributed to reinforcing gender inequality.[19] In the case of Borgo San Sepolcro, it is difficult to assess the extent of these disparities, as the legislation concerning inheritance prior to Florentine rule has not survived. However, by analogy with contemporary and neighbouring contexts, it is plausible to suppose that the designation of legatees was subject to fewer constraints than that of the universal heir, more tightly bound to patrilineal descent and to male control. Women may therefore have allocated their personal belongings more deliberately, exercising tighter control over these material items than other kinds of resources, such as real property or liquid assets.[20] The extent to which these gift-giving practices shaped women's relationship to material culture – and whether it encouraged a greater awareness of the social functions of things – remains an important and largely underexplored question. In the following pages, some of the case studies discussed will offer further insight into the relationship between gender, the circulation of goods and materiality.[21]

Another essential aspect concerns the social background and economic status of the testators. Identifying the individuals who comprise the sample involves several challenges. Some internal elements within the last wills allow to assess the socio-economic position of the testators: some are explicit, such as titles, surnames, or professions; others provide indirect clues, such as the bequest of landed property, the value of a dowry returned to a wife, or the transmission of work tools, which may indicate a professional identity. Such information, however, is far from systematic, making it impossible to draw general conclusions. For instance, it is well known that professions were not consistently recorded in wills, particularly in the case of women. With these

[18] See, in particular, Rossi (a cura di) *Margini di libertà*.
[19] The literature on this topic is vast. Here some key references for different contexts: Bezzina (ed.), "Beyond Their Dowries;" Chabot, *La dette des famille*; Chojnacki, *Women and Men*; Guglielmotti (a cura di), *Donne, famiglie e patrimony*. For a comparative perspective: Chabot, "Deux, trois, cent Italies;" Kuehn, *Law, Family, and Women*.
[20] The situation is similar in Florence: Chabot, "Io vo' fare testamento." Similar considerations on women's disposal of movable goods under different legal regimes can be found in French, "To Free Them from Binding;" Howell, "Fixing Movables;" Lowe, "Women's Devotional Bequests," 408-9.
[21] Scholars of early modern Europe have studied this topic much more thoroughly. See, for instance, the recent collective work Cremer (ed.), *Gender, Law, and Material Culture*. For a historiographical overview on gender and objects, with a specific focus on medieval and early modern Italy, see Chabot, Galasso, Leclerc, Rimbert (éd.), "Objets: genre, pratiques, représentations."

caveats in mind, we can identify with reasonable confidence the socio-economic status of the testators in only 45 cases. Of these, 28 belong to some of the oldest and most prominent families of Borgo; notable family names appear in the sample include the Becordati, Carsidoni, Dotti, and Pichi. These families occupied the top tier of the local ruling class, although their political prominence did not shield them from a gradual decline in wealth over the course of the fifteenth century.[22] Alongside them, we find blacksmiths, haberdashers, shoemakers, dyers, and notaries – the few occupations mentioned explicitly – as well as clergymen and nuns. As for the remaining individuals, it is difficult to situate them precisely on the social scale. Despite these uncertainties, it is clear that testamentary documentation captures a broad social spectrum. Even a servant and former slave, Caterina from *Tartaria*, was able to dictate a will. In 1429, among her final wishes, she left a tablecloth to the altar of San Francesco for the soul of the man she had served – perhaps fulfilling a previous request her master had made.[23] This case is certainly rare, but it offers an extraordinary window onto the diffusion of testamentary practice, this woman's devotional agency, as well as the internal dynamics of the household in which she lived.

When considering the total sample, no significant chronological patterns emerge in the distributions of material bequests, which appear to be relatively evenly spread across fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Expanding the documentary base and undertaking comparative analysis with other geographical areas could yield a more nuanced and historically grounded understanding of chronological trends. In Pisa, for instance, Eleonora Rava found that a significantly higher proportion of bequests were for movable items in an earlier period – reportedly, around 46% in a sample of 568 last wills from 1240 to 1321.[24] Some (very) preliminary data from research I have conducted on Florentine notarial records reveal a percentage similar to that found in Borgo San Sepolcro. Only 20% (83 cases out of 414 wills between 1300 and 1455) contain transfers of objects, with a clear decline over the course of the fifteenth century.[25] These figures indicate a trend that contrasts with patterns observed in other urban centres of late medieval Europe. In a recent volume, Katherine French has highlighted an increase in this type of donation in late medieval London, along with a growing documentary concern for objects, their trans-

[22] On these older lineages and their economic status in the mid-fifteenth century: Scharf, *Borgo San Sepolcro*, 227-44.

[23] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 19282 (08/08/1429), c. 111v: *pro anima Guidi Nannis Bartoli cui fuit famula et serva*. Might this bequest even hint at a relationship of concubinage with her master?

[24] Rava, "Abiti e corredi," 187. See also: Rava, *Volens in testamento vivere*.

[25] These data were extracted from the following notarial records: 49; 133; 162; 164; 165; 196; 205; 207; 314; 834; 942; 1383; 1385; 1387; 1389; 1390; 1391; 1371; 1883; 5829; 6361; 7376; 7377; 9482; 12960; 13973; 14674; 15527; 18470; 18541; 18543; 18778; 18779; 18780; 18784; 18791; 18855; 19282. Between 1297 and 1299, 18 out of a limited sample of 68 wills included bequests of objects, accounting for roughly 30%. This survey has been conducted on: ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 15527.

mission, and their preservation.[26] Her interpretation of the phenomenon is particularly thought-provoking. In a context marked by high mortality, social fragmentation, and uncertainty, objects retained a capacity to endure.[27] They served to stabilise fragile identities, and to sustain familial and social memory. The sample, due to its limited size, does not allow for general conclusions. Only collective research based on a larger dataset can yield convincing insights into the chronological diffusion of these bequests. For the time being, the aim of this contribution is rather to focus on the layered meanings of the social practices that wills allow us to glimpse, as well as on the trajectories of objects that they set into motion.

3. *Weaving relationships: objects in motion between donors and beneficiaries*

Not all items were equally susceptible to transmission. Some circulated far more than others. Clothing, textiles, linens, beds, and bedding clearly predominated. These were followed by chests, containers of various sizes, and, more occasionally, domestic utensils and work tools. Books, weapons, and footwear appeared only rarely. These goods moved along two different – though not strictly separate – channels of transmission, each corresponding to distinct relational networks that conferred specific social meanings and functions upon personal belongings. One channel encompassed religious communities, lay confraternities, ecclesiastical institutions, and hospitals, while the other involved individuals within the testator's social sphere (relatives, co-workers, neighbours, and friends). Personal objects were more often directed towards the second group. These bequests offer a valuable lens for examining patterns of transmission and the functions attributed to material objects across different forms of social connection. They reveal how these objects became intertwined with the lived experiences of various individuals. Let us begin by focusing on this latter group.

The largest single category among all recipients consists of cases in which the relationship to the testator is unspecified (39.3%). Given the common notarial practice of explicitly stating family ties, it is likely that these recipients belonged to a wider kinship network or to the testator's broader social milieu.[28] Among the clearly named relationships, it is notable that wives were favoured most frequently by their husbands (25.7%). By contrast, no examples were found of objects moving in the opposite direction, from wife to husband. Vertical transfers to children (10%)[29] and nephews/nieces (6.4%) are also well

[26] French, *Household Goods*.
[27] French, 42.
[28] All percentages are calculated with respect to a total of 140 individuals named as legatees of bequests.
[29] Most of these transmissions connect mothers to daughters.

represented, as are horizontal bequests to siblings, with sisters (8.6%) far outnumbering brothers as beneficiaries (1.4%). Other ties involving household servants (2.9%), mothers (2.1%), daughters-in-law (1.4%), sisters-in-law (1.4%), and grandchildren (0.7%) only surface sporadically.[30] The reasons why men and women chose to bequeath certain objects to some individuals and not to others – a decision far from insignificant – escape the dry formulas of the notarial register. Nevertheless, some hypotheses can be put forward.

Examining the network that these bequests reveal, a key question is the extent to which the choice of legatees was constrained by family property regimes and the norms governing the transfer of assets or the legal status of objects.[31] As already noted, no statutes regulating inheritance or individual property rights survive from before the mid-fifteenth century. It is only through notarial records that we can trace the circulation of wealth and uncover patrimonial patterns within this context. One such pattern concerns the transfer of goods between spouses. In certain bequests from husbands to wives, the logic is clearly one of restitution: the return of objects that formally belonged to the wife but were placed under the husband's control during the marriage. This is especially true for items that formed a bride's dowry or trousseau, as well as for clothing, linens, and other personal effects such as rings and jewels that women received, acquired or crafted over their lifetime. The will of Nicoluccio di Cisco Carsidoni (1357) offers an interesting example. It contains a meticulous list of goods that Maddalena had brought to the household and that were therefore returned to her: a pair of sheets (of 29 meters), two large tablecloths (one 12 meters, the other 6 meters), six hand towels, fifteen foot towels, and four wide towels.[32] Maddalena also regained all her clothing, silver accessories and their decorations, belts, purses, wreaths, and other various household items.[33] The will functioned as a true inventory. Incidentally, it is worth noting how easily the memory of all these goods

[30] Here are the percentages in order: 2.9%; 2.1%; 1.4%; 1.4%; 0.7%.

[31] On the forced or regulated dimensions of objects' circulation, see Feller, Rodríguez (éd.), *Objets sous contrainte*.

[32] ASFi, *Notarile Antecosimiano*, 6866 (20/10/1357), cc. 1373v-1375r: *unum par linteaminum quinquaginta brachiorum vel plures, duas tobaleas magnas ad tabulam, unam videlicet 22 brachiorum et aliam duodecim brachiorum, sex tobalietas ad manum, quindicem sciuggatoria extremitatis, quactuor sciugatoria larga* (c. 1374r). Cases in which it is explicitly stated that the donated goods were part of the women's trousseaus are rare. Isabelle Chabot makes a similar observation regarding Florence, where the restitution of the trousseau was a rather complex matter. Although these goods were legally considered *bona paraphernalia*, in practice they were treated as *bona dotalia* – that is, as part of the dowry, and thus calculated within it and returned in monetary form. Upon the husband's death, however, these goods could also be recovered as movable property, meaning they could be reclaimed twice. See: Chabot, *La dette des familles*, 211-7, and 239-56.

[33] ASFi, *Notarile Antecosimiano*, 6866 (20/10/1357), c. 1374r. In Florence and towns in central and northern Italy, such items could form part of the counter-dowry. This refers to goods acquired by the husband at the time of the wedding as a ritual gift, in exchange for what he had received. The same may have been true in Borgo San Sepolcro. However, we must consider other possibilities. In one case, the goods transferred by the husband to the wife appear to have been purchased by the latter: Nanni di Francesco, a Florentine living in Borgo, returned a coverlet

could have vanished in the absence of a written record delineating their place within the household property. The description of these possessions in Nicoluccio's will is extraordinarily detailed: might Maddalena, out of personal interest, have kept a written record of her possessions in the house? More often, material bequests to wives are referred to in generic terms, so identifying the status of these goods is not straightforward: *panni lini e lani* (linen and woollen garments), *ornamenti* (trimmings?), *fornimenti* (dress accessories?), and *masserizia* (various household goods and furnishings). Usually, we can only guess what the testator meant by these categories; at best, he specified what they did not include. In 1416, for instance, the blacksmith Andrea di Bartolo not only returned the dowry to his wife, Margherita, and granted her the right to use his household goods during her widowhood, but also left her all the *panni lini e lani* in the house, in addition to her own.[34] One exception was made, however: a cloak (*clamide*) – the finest among those he owned – was bequeathed to her only by half. In the absence of further instructions, we can assume that his designated heir, his daughter Petruccia, inherited the other half of the cloak. Thus, certain objects were transferred not simply by choice, but because prior rights or reciprocal obligations required them to be returned to their legitimate owners. These dynamics operated within a patrimonial system that denied women equal property rights and in which wills could supplement, or even override, prevailing legal norms.

Another form of circulation that is equally constrained concerns objects obtained on loan. The wills in the sample are reticent on this point. Occasionally it is possible to infer such exchanges, but they are only explicitly recorded in a few cases. One of the most revealing examples is the 1360 will of Nicola di Rinaldo Mazzetti.[35] This testament is especially relevant to this study because of the objects it mentions, the family relations involved, and the network of solidarity it reveals. Notably, the goods to be returned had been pledged as security in credit transactions. In his last will, Nicola made a detailed list of all the items he had borrowed and subsequently pawned in exchange for cash. He clearly identified the lenders of goods, the moneylenders on pledge as well as those responsible for redeeming the objects. His two sisters, Necia and Diosa, played active roles in these circuits. Necia had lent him a hoe and two silver spoons, which he pawned to a certain Artino for 28 *popolini* (silver coins). Diosa had temporarily provided a copper pot and a pair of bedsheets, which her brother used to raise modest sums (3 *lire* and 15 *soldi*, and 20 *lire* re-

to his wife Margherita that she had acquired herself. See ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 7001 (03/13/1446), c. 235r: *cultram quam ipsa domina emet*.

[34] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 19282, c. 13r-v (07/12/1416). The widow could only benefit from the usufruct of household goods on the condition that she did not remarry. She was also entitled to the return of her dowry (200 *lire monete cortonesi*) and an additional sum of 50 florins. The *panni lini e lani* that were given to her were not limited to those that she personally used: they included all such items present in the household (*omnes et singulos pannos lineos et laneos*).

[35] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 16187 (01/03/1360), cc.119v-120v.

spectively). Another lender mentioned is his nephew Bartolomeo di Pietro de' Boccagni, whose chainmail shirt was pawned for 20 *lire*. It is unclear whether Nicola was acting on behalf of his relatives or exploiting their goods for his own benefit.[36] Significantly, towards the end of his life, he did provide his sisters with some form of patrimonial protection, which may be interpreted as a kind of compensation. Necia received the usufruct of his house, while Diosa was granted the ownership of all the linens and furnishings it contained.[37] The will sheds light on the multiple uses of objects, which extend far beyond mere functionality, as well as their capacity to act as stores of value. This is well documented in late medieval material culture, and Sansepolcro is no exception.[38] However, Nicola Mazzetti's loans also offer insight into the web of relationships surrounding the circulation of certain goods, and how their uses and meanings were redefined and negotiated. By examining these material movements, we can glimpse the reciprocities, expectations, and solidarity that shaped the social fabric.

Not all bequests were dictated by strict obligations. Some reflect gratitude or recognition for support received during life – or perhaps anticipated after death. From this perspective, certain donations stand out, such as those made to household servants and the many directed towards acquaintances, intended to strengthen or sustain bonds of friendship. Within the family, few examples are as striking as that of Pietro di Simoncino (1439), who promised his wife Tolentina a light green dress as a reward if she agreed to breastfeed their daughter Antonia.[39] This clause points to the possibility of negotiation within the family unit. The dress – perhaps once owned or requested by Tolentina – served as an incentive for assuming a caregiving role that was not taken for granted. It is not difficult to imagine that, like this testator, other husbands may have employed similar forms of reward to ensure household stability beyond their own lifetime. The dress may have carried not only considerable

[36] *Ibidem*, 120r. In the case of his nephew, Nicola specified that he had to repay the debt to reclaim his chainmail shirt. As for the loan from his sister Necia, it was stipulated that the lender's heirs were to return the two silver spoons. The goods belonging to Diosa, meanwhile, had to be redeemed by Nicola's brother and returned to their sister.

[37] In the first version of his will, Nicola left his sister all the cloths, household furnishings, and the usufruct of the house. However, in a codicil dictated to the notary on the same day, he introduced a significant amendment. Specific items of bed linen (*unam culcitrellam vermilliam, unum capaçale vermilium et unum par linteaminum*) were removed from the textiles initially assigned to his sister and given to his brother Lisgio. Lisgio was also granted the usufruct of the house, while Diosa was left a plot of land: ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 16187 (01/03/1360), c. 120v.

[38] Carboni, Muzzarelli (a cura di), *In pegno*; Smail, *Legal Plunder*; Smail, "Persons and Things."

[39] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 7046 (05/03/1439), c.n.n. The term *saccum* may be ambiguous, as it can also refer to a straw mattress or a sack. In this case, however, it seems clear that it denotes a garment. *Item unum saccum viridis clari pro eius dorso, et hoc videlicet dictum saccum viridis clari reliquit sibi cum hac conditione, videlicet si lactaverit dicta eius uxor supradictam Antoniam eorum filiam infantem*. Piero di Simonuccio also left his wife a light blue woollen dress (*saccum panni azurini*) and a short mantle (*mantellinam*) which belonged to her, without attaching any conditions to these items. He provided his newborn daughter with a dowry of 30 florins, while his son Bartolo was named universal heir.

economic value but also significant emotional resonance. For both giver and recipient, such everyday objects often embodied a composite value, shaped by the interplay of practical utility, monetary worth, and personal meaning. To grasp the full significance of these acts of transmission, one must therefore acknowledge the weight of emotions.

Once embedded within a relationship, even the most ordinary objects can become emotionally charged, as they embody shared experiences, memories, and feelings. Their relational properties may outlive their owners and be reactivated with each use.[40] The words chosen by testators to identify and describe the objects they bequeathed – though filtered through the notary's pen – may thus offer subtle clues to these intangible values. Not all items, in fact, were described with the same level of detail: some were singled out more carefully than others. Objects could be described by their condition (with the adjectives such as "old", "used", and "best" recurring most often), the name of a previous owner, their size, colour, pattern, shape, or material – especially for textiles – and their economic value. For example, Andreuccio di Accorsuccio stated that the cloak he left to his sister had belonged to his wife Paola (1348),[41] while Cecca di Cristofero bequeathed a particular pillow with a *veste ad reticellam* (a net-patterned cover) to her niece, while her children received unnamed pillows and other bed linens (1430).[42] These descriptors made certain objects immediately recognisable. Yet they may also signify something more. The item in question was not only distinguished from the undifferentiated mass of household goods, but also made singular and meaningful, imbued with a specific identity and charisma.[43] By naming its features, the testator increased its value in the eyes of the beneficiary. Does this attention suggest care (or even attachment) on the part of the testator toward certain possessions? Or might it express a chosen bond with both the object and its recipient? In a world where material goods were increasing and diversifying, it seems that objects needed to be distinguished with greater precision. This process may also have fostered new attitudes towards personal belongings. Describing objects in the context of transmission may thus point to the emergence of personal, affective taxonomies – systems of meaning in which objects were valued not only

[40] See, on this point, the stimulating perspectives offered by sociology and psychology: Dassié, *Objets d'affection*; Turkle (ed.), *Evocative Objects*. Useful reflections on the emotional properties of objects, and more broadly on the intersection between the history of emotions and material culture studies, can be found in: Dolan, Holloway, "Emotional Textiles;" Jaritz (ed.), *Emotions and Material Culture*; Downes, Holloway, Randles (eds), *Feeling Things*; Trigg, Welch, "Objects, Material Culture and History of Emotions."

[41] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 6866 (July 1348), c. 1346r.

[42] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 19282 (04/09/1430), c. 72v.

[43] Lisa Liddy adopted this approach in her study of a sample of 540 wills dictated by the inhabitants of York between 1400 and 1600. The context, however, is quite different: the people of York were significantly more verbose when describing their possessions: Liddy, "Affective Bequests," 279-80. A similar conceptual framework can be found in French, *Household Goods*, 49-54, and Foroughi, "From Christmas Candlesticks to Deathbeds," 393-8. Valuable insights into textual descriptions of objects and their meanings can be found in Smail, *Legal Plunder*, 67-76.

as commodities, but also for their affective and mnemonic significance they carried, and for the web of relationships they evoked.

A related set of practices concerns the circulation of everyday objects to ecclesiastical and charitable institutions. These were *pro anima* bequests – public acts of piety intended to aid the donor's soul. As art historian Michele Bacci has noted, such donations functioned as "investments in the afterlife":[44] testators expected returns in the form of spiritual rewards beyond the grave, while also accruing prestige and social distinction within their earthly communities. These gifts, as we will see, nourished the material and visual culture of shared spaces by publicly displaying the donor's name, and thus their identity and status. The bequests were distributed among a wide range of institutions, reflecting Borgo's dense and complex devotional landscape.[45] In some cases, personal goods reached these places only after being temporarily entrusted to private individuals. For instance, in 1361 Andreuccio bequeathed bed linen to his wife Jacopa on the condition that she remain in the household and not remarry; otherwise, or upon her death, the item was to be transferred to the hospital of Santa Maria della Misericordia.[46] A similar clause appears several decades later, in 1431, when Antonia, widow of Andrea, provisionally assigned to her niece Jacopa a quilt, a pair of sheets, and a new shirt, which were ultimately to be donated to the confraternity of Sant'Antonio.[47] We cannot know how these family situations unfolded in practice, but it is certain that, by accepting the usufruct of these goods, the beneficiaries would likely have used linens they did not legally own – items to be preserved with care until their definitive destination. Such provisions blur the formal distinction between *pro anima* bequests and other forms of donations, while also highlighting the need to make the most of available material resources, extending their life span and functions across time and across different social settings.

Pious monetary bequests – whether left freely or earmarked for long-term commemorative projects – are far more common than gifts of objects. While this study does not focus on such donations, the extensive quantitative research devoted to them cannot be ignored; acknowledging it helps to situate the present findings within a broader analytical framework. The benchmark is James Banker's 1988 analysis of Borgo's two leading confraternities, the Fraternita di San Bartolomeo and the Laudesi of Santa Maria della Notte.

[44] Bacci, *Investimenti per l'aldilà*.
[45] We find mention of the hospitals of the churches of the Disciplinati of Santa Maria, Santa Maria Maddalena, San Lorenzo del Borghetto, Santa Croce, and Santa Maria della Misericordia; the convents of the Augustinians, Servites, and Franciscans; the churches of San Nicola and San Fortunato; and the confraternities of San Bartolomeo, the Laudi di Santa Maria della Notte, and Santa Maria della Misericordia. For more information on pious institutions in late medieval Borgo San Sepolcro, I refer to: Banker, *Death in the Community*; Scharf, *Borgo San Sepolcro*, 178-86; Scharf, "Borgo San Sepolcro, i poveri, i malati e i pellegrini."
[46] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 16187 (05/08/1361), cc. 123v-124r. More precisely: *unam culcitram, unam cultrem, unum piumaccium, unum sacconem et unum par linteaminum*.
[47] Banker, *Death in the Community*.

Drawing on Francesco de' Largi's compilation of testamentary bequests to the two confraternities, Banker documented a general decline in pious donations after the mid-fourteenth century, accompanied by a sharp change in its composition.[48] Small cash gifts or token amounts of grain were gradually replaced by larger donations in money or landed propriety, from which testators expected concrete returns, such as income administration or the construction and maintenance of commemorative objects and places. The historian offered no explanation for this shift. Samuel Cohn, in a later quantitative survey of several central-Italian cities, proposed one.[49] Observing the same rise in less 'liquid' and more tangible commemorative gifts, he linked the phenomenon to a new "attachment to wordly possessions", prompted by recurrent plague outbreaks, especially the epidemic of 1362-3. The earlier testamentary practice, encouraged by mendicant preaching, of liquidating wealth to expiate the sins of usury and accumulation appears to have waned, paving the way for a different relationship with materiality. By the late fourteenth century, remembrance seemed more firmly anchored in things than ever before. How bequests of personal objects fit into this broader transformation remains to be established. In the sample examined here, their overall presence is quantitatively small. Yet the practice of donating to pious sites objects that had been used in daily life – sometimes by several family members, or even by individuals from different households – carried cultural and anthropological significance that deserves closer scrutiny.

4. *Th shifting paths of objects between reuse and resignification*

What happens then if we shift our focus to the objects themselves? A last will captures a distinct segment in an object's changing life: its transfer from one owner to another, its movement from one household to the next, and its transition from the sphere of everyday life into a devotional setting. As previously noted, garments, fabrics, household linens, beds, and bedding appear frequently in wills; these will be the focus of our attention. Such artefacts have been studied from various angles: as commodities within histories of production and consumption, as cultural products shaped by fashion, and as markers of identity and status within broader strategies of social distinc-

[48] While serving as prior of the Confraternity of San Bartolomeo in 1437, Francesco de' Largi undertook a project to trace the history of the institution, resulting in the *Specchio della Fraternita di San Bartolomeo*. In this text, he recorded 1,033 bequests made between 1247 and 1437. These were studied and partially transcribed by Amintore Fanfani in 1933 (Fanfani, "I benefattori d'una fraternita toscana"). In another work, Largi also collected 621 donations made to the Confraternity of Santa Maria della Notte between 1316 and 1440. A comprehensive study of this material has been offered by James Banker (Banker, *Death in the Community*, 75-144).
[49] Cohn, *Paradoxes of Inequality*; Cohn, "Renaissance Attachment to Things;" Cohn, *The Cult of Remembrance*.

tion.[50] Their centrality in late medieval material culture is undeniable, and evidence of their circulation through wills confirms this further. What trajectories did these goods follow within spaces that were separate from (yet adjacent to) the marketplace? What new lives might they aspire to? What effects did their movement have on the materiality of the objects themselves and on the people who encountered and possessed them?

4.1. *Clothing, linen*s

Let us focus on the last wishes of Sovrana, the widow of Castrone and daughter of Vanni Maghinardi. On 13 August 1348, when the Black Death had already reached Tuscany, she wrote her own will in the vernacular.[51] She arranged for her wardrobe to be distributed among a wide range of beneficiaries, providing details of the textiles' characteristics.[52] To a woman named Giovanna, the wife of Guido – whether a relative or merely an acquaintance is unclear – she left a gown (*gonnella*), an over-gown (*guarnaccia*), a cloak (*mantello*), and a head ornament (*grilanda*). Her sister Vanna received a gown and over-gown; her niece Sovrana, daughter of her brother, received another gown and over-gown with its lining, described as "garofanati", that is a shade within the red spectrum;[53] and her sister-in-law Gina a cotte (*cotta*) with its lining.[54] Four women from her family circle and two churches thus in-

[50] The historiography on textiles and clothing is extensive, and it is not possible to provide a complete list here. Some important references can be found in these recent works: *Le vêtement au Moyen Âge*; *Quantum Valet*; Muzzarelli, *Gurdaroba medievale*; "Valore e valori della moda." Research on beds and bed linens has recently become particularly lively, see especially: Chabot, Rimbert, "Comme on fait son lit, on se couche"; Crouzet-Pavan, *Une autre histoire de la Renaissance*, 67-84; French, Smith, Stanbury, "An Honest Bed;" Frugoni, *A letto nel Medioevo*; Duranti, "Trasmettere il letto."

[51] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 2263 (13/08/1348), c.n.n. This is a peculiar case: Sovrana expressed her final wishes in the first person and probably wrote the document herself, which was subsequently authenticated by the notary. Although Sovrana's will is rare, it is not unique. I have identified other similar examples in Tuscan notarial records, see Galasso, "Last Strokes of the Pen."

[52] These bequests follow earlier donations of money to the hospitals and pious institutions in Borgo. Of particular note is the gift of 5 soldi to each female recluse, whether living within or outside the town walls, and 5 soldi to those referred to as *lebrosi dela malatia*.

[53] *Quantum valet*, p. 327. Gérard-Marchant, "Compter et nommer," 98, classifies the adjective within the range of yellow hues, although she raises some doubts about its precise meaning.

[54] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 2263 (13/08/1348), c.n.n.: *Ancho lascio ala Giovanna molglie de Guido el miei panni cioè n'è la gonela e la guarnaccia e mantello dala saia grilanda garafonata/Ancho lascio a madonna Vanna mia solella uno paio de panni da cholo cioène gonella e guarnaccia/Ancho lascio ala Sovrana figliola de Jacomo mio fratello uno paio di panni garafonati cioène gonella e guarnaccia e fodero e ala Gina sua madre la mia cotta delo sbiadato colo fodero*. The *gonnella* is a close-fitting tunic or gown with sleeves, most often made of wool; it is worn beneath the *guarnacca* and the *mantello*. The *guarnacca* is a loose overgarment, long and open at the sides; it may have sleeves and be lined with skin or fur. The *cotta* is likewise a tunic with long and wide sleeves; it was worn by both men and women, with or without an overgarment. On these terms: Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba medievale*, 355-7; Rava, *'Volens in testamento vivere'*, 289.

herited the garments Sovrana had worn in life; judging from her dispositions, she had no direct descendants. She further specified the fate of her vermilion garments (*panni vermelli*), whose costly dye made them the most precious items[55]: one gown, together with its over-gown, was to be cut up to fashion two altar frontals and a surplice, while another length of fine silk fabric (çondado) was to be used to make a shirt (*camiscio*). The intended beneficiaries were the churches of San Francesco and Santa Maria della Misericordia.[56]

This woman's choices exemplify a broader pattern. Donations of clothing, fabrics, and household linens (setting aside bedlinen for the moment) occur proportionally more often in wills made by women – roughly two out of every three women's wills, compared to one in three for men.[57] This disparity is not dramatic, yet it widens considerably once the many husband-to-wife bequests of *panni lini e lani* are excluded. In short, women would appear to have made more differentiated use of their individual garments. Like Sovrana, these women tended to dismantle their wardrobes – and even the fabrics from which their garments were made – to benefit relationships cultivated during life, mostly horizontal ties to other women, or to inscribe their presence within the public sphere of devotion. The close connection between women and donations of this kind has been noted elsewhere. Gender, in fact, appears to be a more decisive factor than socio-economic status in shaping the more diversified trajectories of such goods.[58] Yet, this pattern extends to other categories of movables and likely reflects a subtle interplay of circumstances. As we have noted, women may have enjoyed greater freedom to dispose of their movables than to designate heirs to their property; during their widowhood, they could become the final owners of household chattels or receive their usufruct with the commitment to pass them on later to charitable institutions. Their choices, moreover, may have been shaped by a distinctive form of female sociability that was sustained through the exchange and gifting of material things. What needs to be emphasized here are the effects of such practices: they consolidated certain gendered models of femininity across generations – models literally to be "worn" and reproduced. Yet they also paved the way for their unmaking and to unexpected short-circuits. As Katherine French and Nicola Lowe have shown for medieval England, women could materially impress their sign upon a liturgical space otherwise denied to them by having their garments

[55] On the costs of dyes, see Harsch, *La teinture*.

[56] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 2263 (13/08/1348), c.n.n.: *Ancho lascio ei miei panni vermelli ciò ene una gonella e guarnaccia che se ne facino de' paramenti d'altare l'uno no lascio a San Francesscho e l'atro a Santa Maria dela Misericordia e del çondado dela detta guarnaccia lascio che se faccia una cotta da prete d'altare e tanto panno che basti per uno camiscio e la detta cotta e detto camiscio lascio alla detta Santa Maria della Misericordia*.

[57] More precisely: textile bequests appear in 51.3% of female wills, compared to 36.8% of male wills.

[58] On this: Rava, "Abiti e corredi," 187.

and linens transformed into sacred vestments, ecclesiastical clothing, or altar cloths.[59] We are dealing with a cultural system in which material things could embody the invisible. Gifts of textiles, therefore, evoked not only memory, but the very presence of the donors.[60] The same was true in Sansepolcro and across Tuscany: paradoxically, through fabrics that had once covered their bodies, women could not only negotiate their remembrance within the community, but also narrow the distance between themselves and the sacred.[61] Even a simple tablecloth could suffice.

Sovrana's last will also highlights a practice of textile reuse that entailed substantial structural and functional alterations and always involved a symbolic reconversion. Only when goods were meant to leave the domestic space did testators spell out the transformations to be undertaken, defining their new form and purpose. Mantles, gowns, and doublets were to be cut and refashioned into dalmatics, chasubles, tunicles, liturgical vestments, altar hangings and garments for sacred statues.[62] Tablecloths of various sizes were repurposed to cover altars. In Borgo, alongside vestments and altar palls, we glimpse a still little-studied practice – less attested in Tuscan wills: donations to clothe sacred statues and crucifixes.[63] In medieval Christian religiosity, this custom enhanced the realism of the images and fostered worshippers' emotional engagement.[64] Although rare in the sample, this kind of donation may have been more widespread in the area, as suggested by the vibrant local devotion and the flourishing production of wooden statues made to be clothed.[65] The earliest evidence concerns cash legacies to commission garments for the abbey's statue of the Virgin Mary and for the monumental crucifix – the *Volto Santo* – in the parish church of Santa Maria.[66] The first documented instance of a personal garment being repurposed that I have come across dates to 1456. In that year, Candia de Sinibaldi de' Becordati stipulated that her black wool *vestitum* be used to clothe the figure of the Virgin in San Francesco, the

[59] French, "To Free Them from Binding;" Lowe, "Women's Devotional Bequests."
[60] This point is illustrated in the volume Elster, Luther, Seeberg, Michalsky (ed.), *Textile Gifts*, 11.
[61] On the reuse of women's luxurious garments in Florence, see Chabot, "Renaissance Female Luxury Garments."
[62] On the cultural significance of ecclesiastical garments, see Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*.
[63] Valentina Costantini has identified several similar examples in Lucca. She presented some of them in her paper "Oggetti in memoria: mestieri e genere nei testamenti lucchesi e fiorentini (secolo XIII – primo XVI)," delivered at the international workshop *Oggetti agenti. Pratiche e culture materiali tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, held at the University of Padua on 15 and 16 May 2025.
[64] On this point, with particular attention to post-Tridentine period, see Refice, Conticelli, Gatta (a cura di), *Madonnine Agghindate*; Pagnozzato (a cura di), *Madonne della Laguna*; Trexler, "Habiller et déshabiller." On the distinct yet related practice of dressing sacred dolls within the context of Florentine private devotion, see Klapisch-Zuber, "Les saintes poupées."
[65] Czortek, "La devozione al Volto Santo," Cristina Galassi has studied the workshop of sixteenth-century craftsmen who specialized in wooden crucifixes: see Galassi, *Sculture da "vestire"*.
[66] Czortek, "La devozione al Volto Santo."

church where she wished to be buried alongside her husband.[67] Once again, a personal garment was reconfigured within a devotional setting for sacred display; yet this time, it was not transformed into altar or clerical furnishings but resumed its function as clothing for the Virgin Mary. Moving from a pious woman to the model of Christian femininity, it made the donor's private virtue publicly visible. The garment's new destination was charged with metaphorical and symbolic meanings that would not have escaped Candia or the members of her community.

We may assume that all these textile bequests were likely favoured by wealthier donors possessing wardrobes of fine, durable fabrics suitable for impressive, long-lasting vestments. When figures are given, the sums confirm the high value involved: in the period, a silk pall could cost ten to 25 florins. In 1429, Baldo di Vico bequeathed 20 florins to commission a silk-and-gold garment for the abbey's statue of the Virgin;[68] in 1468 Contessa, widow of Ludovico Bartoli, commissioned a 50-florin silk cope embroidered with her family arms.[69] A slightly earlier example from nearby towns hints at another possibility: in 1379, Giovanni di Troiano from Arezzo left a modest 7 *lire* to buy "a used white chasuble" (*pianeta albam usitatam*) for the church of Sant'Agnese.[70] Besides raising questions about a second-hand market for liturgical textiles, this case shows that even humbler, worn garments – provided they were still serviceable – could aspire to a new life.

4.2. *Beds, bedding*

Beds and their associated textiles followed distinct trajectories within the material world of late medieval Borgo. In sparsely furnished households, the bed stood as the principal item of domestic furniture. It served as a telling indicator of socio-economic status, ranging from simple wooden frames filled with straw to more elaborate constructions raised on chests, adorned with carved headboards, and enclosed by curtains, which appear in affluent homes from the mid-fourteenth century onward.[71] Its economic value was deter-

[67] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 7001 (27/07/1456), c. 174r: *Et pro anima sua reliquit figure beate Virginis Marie in ecclesia Sancti Francisci pro paramento altaris ad dictam figuram quendam vestitum dicte domine panni lane nigri pro usu et ornatu dicti altaris que figura vocata est la Madonna di San Leo*. The term *vestitum* denotes an overgarment.

[68] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 19282 (22/03/1429), c. 110v: *Item reliquit societati fustigatorum sancte Marie Magdalene de dicto Burgo quod fiat unum vestimentum de serico ad aurum pro domina nostra Vergine Maria et filio de abbatia Burgi expensis sue hereditatis*. This case in also mentioned in Czortek, "La devozione al Volto Santo," 87.

[69] ASFi, *Norarile antecosimiano*, 7001 (21/07/1468), c. 85r: *Item reliquit legavit sacrestie abbatie Burgi predicti florenos quinquaginta pro emendo et faciendo unum paramentum que vocatur vulgariter el pievirole de siricho cum armis ipsius dicte testatricis*.

[70] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 1920 (18/07/1379), c. 14r.

[71] A chest-bed is documented in a will of 1416: the haberdasher Uguccio di Bartolo left his sister, among other things, the usufruct of a *leticam cum capsonibus*: ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*,

mined by dimensions, ornamentation, and, above all, the quality and quantity of textiles.[72] From one room to another, or to charitable institutions, a bed could be transferred as a *fulcitum* – that is, a wooden structure (*lettiera*) equipped with its layered furnishings: a straw sack (*saccone*), stacked wool mattresses, a featherbed (*culcitra*),[73] linen sheets (*linteamen*), quilts (*coltre*), coverlets (*copertorio*, *celone*), and cushions (*capezzale*, *guanciale*, *pimaccio*). Bed frames were never donated in disassembled form, as attested elsewhere,[74] whereas mattresses, linens, blankets, and pillows were commonly assigned to different individuals and places.[75]

These things, too, followed gendered lines of transmission. While the overall proportion of men (47.37%) and women (44.68%) who bequeathed beds was not significantly different, their choices of recipients diverged markedly. Men tended to favour their wives, followed by family members or close associates (80.56%), whereas women more often directed their beds towards hospitals and religious institutions (61.90%). In such pious legacies, it is particularly noteworthy that bedding predominated – even if only a blanket, a pair of sheets, or a set of pillowcases – while the wooden frame, when present, likely remained within the household.

Beds served as the stage for key moments in the family life cycle: conjugal intimacy, birth, and death. In most households, a sleeping place of one's own was a true luxury, and it was therefore common for beds to be shared collectively. To whom did they belong? In Florence, the donation of the marital bed to widows has been interpreted as an act of recognition, since women typically did not own the furnishings of the homes they inhabited. These furnishings, especially in patrician households, were usually purchased by the husband after marriage.[76] Yet patterns of ownership did not function uniformly across regions. In certain northern and southern Italian cities – such as Bergamo, Ferrara, Venice, Palermo, and Catania – the bed formed part of the dowry,

19282 (01/12/1416), cc. 49r-v. An especially sumptuous bed seems to have been owned by Giuliano di Nolfo dei Dotti; it, too, had built-in chests and curtains: ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 7001 (13/03/1446) c. 235r. On the other hand, the term *lettuccio* referred to what we would recognise today as a single day-bed or sofa, with a high back set against the wall.

[72] The expenditures that Florentine husbands recorded in their account books for furnishing the nuptial chambers give us an idea of the large sums that could be spent on such furniture. In 1361, the wool merchant Filippo di Gherardo Nozzi shelled out the hefty sum of 112 florins to make and supply a bed and a *lettuccio*. The wooden frames cost 18 florins in all, whereas the rich bedlinen and curtains amounted to 94 florins. By way of comparison, his wife's dowry totalled 500 florins: Chabot, Rimbert, "Comme on fait son lit, on se couche," 8.

[73] In a furnished bed, this item is often the only component recorded, with no mention of a mattress; testators sometimes specified that it was filled with feathers.

[74] For instance, in women's last wills from Bergamo: Brolis, "Introduzione," XXXIII-XXXIV.

[75] For example, in 1431, Chelina, wife of Nesi di Matteo, bequeathed a fully furnished bed to the convent of Sant'Agostino, specifying *una cultrice, una cultra, duobus plumaciis et uno pari lenteaminum* – that is, a feather mattress, a quilt, two feather pillows, and a pair of linen sheets. She also left a silk cushion embroidered in gold to the Servi di Maria and another, similar one to the confraternity of the Disciplinati di Santa Maria della Misericordia**:** ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 19282 (28/03/1431), c. 73v.

[76] Chabot, Rimbert, "Comme on fait son lit, on se couche," 7.

brought by the wife into the husband's household and, as such, reclaimed in widowhood.[77] It is not entirely clear how things worked in Borgo. Some clues point to practices (and perhaps norms) that differed significantly from those in Florence. This is suggested by the 1348 last will of Dielcidede, which referred to a bed promised to him as part of the dowry of his wife, Nesa.[78] Just over twenty years later, Clara, widow of Lando, bequeathed to the Servi di Maria church a set of goods that – as she stated – were to be returned to her by her husband as part of her dowry, specifying the value of each item. Among them was a bed appraised at 11 *lire*, a small vessel (*vegeticulum*) worth just under half the bed's value (5 *lire*), and a small chest valued at 3 *lire*.[79] When, in 1345, the notary ser Baldino, widowed and without heirs, named the Fraternita of San Bartolomeo as his universal heir, he placed a bed in the care of a certain Imilia, daughter of Baldo, possibly as a contribution to her dowry.[80] The data, however, remain fragmentary and span a long period of time. It is plausible that practices varied according to the family's economic means, and that, in the absence of other resources, beds and bedding could represent the only significant component of a woman's dowry. In any case, when women did own such items, they were more inclined to invest them with spiritual meaning, turning them into instruments of charity for hospitals, infirmaries, and religious communities.

Pious donations of this kind must have been within reach of a broad segment of the population if even a set of bedsheets worth just 50 *soldi* could be given for this purpose.[81] The previously mentioned bed donated by Clara in 1363, valued at 11 *lire*, is the only one accompanied by an explicit monetary assessment, and even that was a modest sum. It is worth noting that in the very same year, in Florence, Alamanna di Ciapo bequeathed a bed to the poor of the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova and had it appraised at 15 florins, equivalent to roughly 123 days' wages for an unskilled labourer.[82] Considering the sums testators donated to acquire, build, or furnish beds for charitable institutions, the highest recorded comes for a 1459 bequest by Bernardo di Martino: 30 florins to the confraternity of Santa Maria della Misericordia to purchase sheets, blankets, pillows and *omnes alias res spectantes ad lectum* – likely sufficient to equip several beds in full.[83] Among both the poor and the

[77] Bresc-Bautier, Bresc, *Une maison de mots*, 65-9; Brolis, "Introduzione," XXXIV; Chabot, Rimbert, "Comme on fait son lit, on se couche," 7.
[78] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 6866 (19/09/1348), cc. 94r-95v
[79] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 16187 (20/12/1362), c. 132v. This document is a *donatio mortis causa*.
[80] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 6866 (11/08/1345), c. 1311r-v.
[81] The donation was made by Lorenzo di Cesco, who left also 10 florins to have his tomb adorned with paintings of saints: ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 6866 (the document is in vernacular, not dated, it was probably drafted after 1362).
[82] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 205 (28/05/1363), c. 7v. Alamanna also entrusted to her son Nicholao *unum lettum bonum ydoneum et decentem fulcitum omnibus ad lectum pertinentibus*. Data to estimate wages come from Goldthwaite, *The Economy*, 364.
[83] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 7001 (15/10/1459), c. 225r.

rich, beds were an effective means of securing salvation. In wills, these items are seldom distinguished by personal or identifying features. In most cases, we are presented with anonymous pieces of bedding, at most accompanied by a note on size or condition (whether new or used). Only in one instance do we find details on colours and decorative patterns: a yellow-and-blue blanket adorned with fleur-de-lis motifs, donated in 1434 by Caterina, wife of Bartolomeo, to the hospital of Santa Croce, along with a pair of sheets.[84] It is likely that such items were described in detail because they were exceptional – more valuable, more refined, and more closely bound to the testator's identity. Some beds retained a strong memorial association with their donor, as clearly confirmed by bequests calling for the painting of coats of arms or other personalised items to be painted on them.[85] Although no such examples survive in Borgo, it is known that bed frames could be personalized with painted portraits of the benefactors or sacred images. A unique surviving example is the well-known bed preserved in the church of *Santa Maria delle Grazie* in Pistoia.[86] Its headboard and footboard contain two panels from the 1330s – most likely originating from two different beds – which depict the donors presenting themselves to the Virgin. Accompanying these images are inscriptions containing the donors' names. These artworks use images and words to visually "sign" the gift: to bind the object indissolubly to the name of its former owners or patrons, and remind the sick to pray for those who provided them with the comfort of a bed.

5. *Concluding remarks*

This essay has proposed an approach to analysing the relationship between people and things by adopting the perspective of testamentary bequests. Goods passing from one individual to another had economic value: they could serve as a store of value, as a medium of exchange, or as collateral in credit transactions, thereby supporting strategies of economic survival. However, this economic value coexisted with an unquantifiable affective one. Objects carried with them another life and another time: they were traces of other existences. They had symbolic potential that could be exploited beyond the domestic sphere. Objects appeared here as commodities, functional tools, and markers of status, as well as something more, when we consider the elective bond that people established with specific goods. Testators were fully aware of these different regimes of value. As we have seen, this is especially

[84] ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*,19282 (14/12/1433), c. 83v.
[85] This only occurs when the beds are commissioned from scratch. For example, in 1422, Urbano de' Pichi donated 20 florins to equip the hospital of the confraternity of the Fustigati of Santa Maria della Misericordia with four beds, each of which was to be personalised with his coats of arms: ASFi, *Notarile antecosimiano*, 19282 (04/09/1422), c. 54v.
[86] Bacci, *Investimenti per l'aldilà*, 98-101.

the case with textiles, beds, and household linens, which emerge as the true protagonists of this analysis and occupy a prominent place in the material and devotional culture of this late medieval community.

Another crucial point of this analysis is how these donations affected social interactions. We have seen how bequests can strengthen the sense of belonging to different communities: the family, allies, and the wider parish. While men were familiar with the relational use of goods, it was practised more extensively by women. The most visible consequences of these practices emerge in the devotional sphere, where items such as garments – involved in the codification of gender roles – could also become instruments for subverting some of these principles. Underlying these donations, I discern a specific, culturally constructed relationship between women and the world of things.

It is particularly noteworthy that similar patterns have been documented in other Tuscan and north-central Italian towns and cities, and even beyond the peninsula. Comparing multiple cities will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the complex anthropological meanings of those practices observed and, where applicable, identify local specificities. At the current stage of the historiographical debate, this represents the most challenging and promising path to pursue through collective scholarly effort.

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