

Introduction

I am more teased than a newlywed, and they say things to me that they would not even say to a new bride. If I am sad, they say I am jealous. If I am happy, they say I can't be missing Francesco di Marco. They talk such rubbish that if you were a young boy it would be bad enough. In this household all they do is joke about you and me [letter 1].

Margherita Datini (1360–1423) was twenty-four when she dictated this message to be sent to her husband, the merchant Francesco di Marco Datini, who was about twenty-five years her senior. The couple had moved from Provence to Tuscany the year before. By the time the correspondence opens, Francesco had established warehouses not only in Prato, the small town ten miles from Florence that he had left as a youth, but also in Pisa and Florence itself. The rapid expansion of Francesco's business made it necessary for him to spend prolonged periods away from home, during which the couple was obliged to communicate by letter. The intriguing reference in this passage to the teasing jokes of Florentine relatives and friends about the Datini marriage alerts us to what appears to be an unconventional relationship, and it whets our appetite for the unfolding saga of their marital collaboration in epistolary exchanges that continued for some twenty-six years.¹ Here is a woman who seems to conform little to the medieval

1. [There are two ranges of footnotes. The main range begins at letter 1; all cross-references will refer to notes within that main range.] See *Le lettere di Margherita Datini a Francesco di Marco (1384–1410)*, ed. Valeria Rosati (Prato: Cassa di Risparmio e Depositi, 1977), and *Le lettere di Francesco Datini alla moglie Margherita (1385–1410)*, ed. Elena Cecchi (Prato: Società Pratese di Storia Patria, 1990). Margherita's letters, including a number of previously unpublished ones, are also available on a CD-ROM. See Diana Toccafondi and Giovanni Tartaglione, ed., *Per la tua Margherita—: lettere di una donna del '300 al marito mercante* (Prato: Archivio di Stato, 2002). Margherita's life in Avignon before her marriage (and, to a lesser extent, after Francesco Datini's death) can be reconstructed only in broad outline, although the current research of Jérôme Hayez, Simona Brambilla, and Ann Crabb on unpublished Datini material may reveal more. For the most recent scholarship on Francesco Datini, see Giampiero Nigro, ed., *Francesco di Marco Datini: The Man, the Merchant* (Flor-

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stereotype of wifely virtue exemplified in its most extreme form in Giovanni Boccaccio's tale of patient Griselda.² Although Margherita admitted that she was not as obedient as a good wife ought to be, she regarded herself as sorely tested by an irascible and idiosyncratic husband who required her to conform to—and to go well beyond—traditional wifely roles.

Her letters to Francesco, here translated into English for the first time, provide a wealth of information about the societies of Prato and Florence, between which the Datinis divided their time.³ Even more remarkably, the letters tell us a great deal about Margherita herself. She reveals her political views and the influence she could exert within Florentine patronage networks by virtue of her aristocratic connections.⁴ She also comments in detail on her household, the tasks her husband delegated to her, and the activities and personalities of the relatives and friends with whom she socialized. The complex portrait of everyday life and social relationships in the urban environments of late-medieval Tuscany that emerges from Margherita's letters is dramatically different from the static, limited view of women's lives presented in the prescriptive texts of her period.

Although letters constitute the largest category of early writing by women of western Europe, fourteenth-century examples are scarce, especially those from lay women. Among the few that have come to light are thirty-one letters of the Florentine Dora Guidalotti del Bene, also a merchant's wife and Margherita's contemporary, and

ence: Firenze University Press, 2010), and Paolo Nanni, *Ragionare tra mercanti: Per una rilettura della personalità di Francesco di Marco Datini (1335ca–1410)* (Pisa: Pacini, 2010).

2. In Boccaccio's tale (day 10, tale 10), Griselda remained docile and obedient to a husband who tested her virtue with ever more inventive forms of cruelty. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Antonio Quaglio (Milan: Garzanti, 1974), 927–39.

3. We have translated all but one of the letters that are transcribed in the CD-ROM edition of Margherita's letters to Francesco. This most complete edition dates a much-damaged letter (folio 1401879) as 3.9.1400, but it is more likely to have been written in 1398. Only the date 3 September remains. Because of the difficulty of placing this letter chronologically and its fragmentary condition, we decided not to include it here. See note 548 in letter 218.

4. On this theme see Carolyn James, "Woman's Work in a Man's World: The Letters of Margherita Datini (1384–1410)," in Nigro, ed., *Francesco di Marco Datini*, 53–72.

three written in the 1360s by a Venetian woman named Cataruza.⁵ The letters of Dora del Bene share Margherita's lively, colloquial tone and her concern with domestic detail. The Datini collection, however, offers unique riches. Margherita's more extensive correspondence makes it possible to study both her epistolary voice and her relationship with her husband over time. The collection also has the advantage of breadth, because many letters written by associates, friends, and relatives in her close-knit community also survive in the same archive. This allows us to reconstruct, in unusual detail, the context for the dramas that play out in the Datini couple's exchanges.⁶ For much of her life Margherita was only semiliterate, and nearly all of her letters were dictated to various scribes. Despite this lack of formal training, once she was forced by circumstance to communicate with Francesco by letter, Margherita took firm authorial control of the dictation process. Her correspondence, therefore, provides interesting evidence of how an intelligent and determined woman successfully adapted the mercantile letter—a ubiquitous, practical, dynamically evolving sub-genre of epistolary writing—for her own purposes.⁷

Margherita's Early Life

Margherita's life had scarcely begun when her fate, and that of her family, was profoundly affected by the political factionalism endemic to late-medieval Florence. Her parents, Domenico Bandini and Dianora Gherardini, both belonged to ancient, knightly families that were regarded with suspicion by the major guildsmen and wealthy merchants who dominated the Florentine republic. Resentful of their

5. Three letters written by the noble Venetian widow Cataruza were preserved by the procurators of San Marco as evidence about property division within her family. The extant letters of Dora del Bene were written to her husband and sons. See Guia Passerini, "Dora Guidalotti del Bene: Le lettere (1381–92)," *Letteratura italiana antica* 4 (2003): 101–59, and Linda Guzzetti, "Donne e scrittura nel tardo trecento," *Archivio veneto* 152 (1999): 5–31.

6. See, for example, Ser Lapo Mazzei, *Lettere di un notaio a un mercante del secolo XV, con altre lettere e documenti*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1880).

7. On the evolution of merchant letters, see Jérôme Hayez, "Io non so scrivere a l'amicho per siloscismi": Jalons pour une lecture de la lettre marchande toscane de la fin du Moyen Âge," *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 7 (1997): 37–79.

exclusion from participation in government, a group of twelve magnates, including Bandini and some of his Gherardini relatives, staged an unsuccessful coup against the republican regime toward the end of 1360. Bandini and another conspirator, Niccolò del Buono, were captured and executed. The others, including Dianora's male kin, were exiled, and their property within the city was confiscated.⁸ Although the Florentine government made some provision for the widow by giving her a house that had belonged to her husband in the quarter of Santo Spirito as compensation for her dowry, Dianora and her six children surely found themselves in difficult circumstances.⁹

Margherita must have been the youngest child, born only months before her father's execution, because in a letter of February 1385 Francesco Datini refers to her entering her twenty-fifth year.¹⁰ It remains unclear how exactly Dianora Gherardini and her children fared in the 1360s. The widow might have remained in Florence until her sons reached their teens and became subject to the laws that had forced their older male relatives into exile. Margherita's sister Francesca married the merchant Niccolò dell'Ammannato Tecchini and continued to live in Florence. The rest of the family moved to Avignon, probably with the help of a relative who was already settled among the Florentine colony of merchants there. The presence of Dianora and her children in the papal capital, a city of approximately twenty thousand people, is documented from the early 1370s.¹¹ It was here that Margherita met her future husband.

Francesco di Marco Datini was born in Prato around 1335. His early years, like his wife's, were also traumatic. He and his brother,

8. Gene Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society 1343–1378* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 187.

9. Jérôme Hayez has established that this Florentine house was Bandini property, probably given to Dianora by the Florentine Commune as a refund of her dowry when her husband was executed. The widow apparently used it to raise loans. Consequently it became legally encumbered and caused familial disputes.

10. Francesco to Margherita Datini, 23 February 1385, *Le lettere di Francesco Datini*, 31–35 (34). In Francesco's 1384 tax report, Margherita is said to be 24 (Archivio di Stato, Florence, Estimo 217, folio 388v). I am grateful to Jérôme Hayez for this archival reference.

11. Jérôme Hayez, "Préliminaires à une prosopographie avignonnaise du XIV^e siècle," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Moyen Âge, temps modernes* 100 (1988): 113–24 (121–24).

Stefano, were orphaned after the Black Death swept through Tuscany in the summer of 1348. The brothers were cared for by their guardian and relative, Piero di Giunta del Rosso (Francesco remained intimate with Rosso's descendants all his life), and by Monna Piera di Pratese Boschetti, who took them into her home. In May 1349 Francesco was apprenticed to a Florentine merchant, but after less than a year he set off to seek his fortune in Avignon, the most vibrant financial center in Europe. The opportunities for profit and advancement in Avignon were considerable, and Francesco proved to be an energetic and talented businessman. As Luciana Frangioni has shown, he sold arms and other iron wares such as nails and needles, and he marketed various kinds of cloth and hides.¹² He also produced and sold salt.¹³ These entrepreneurial activities soon made him wealthy.

In 1376, when he was about forty, Francesco finally heeded his foster mother and friends in Prato, who advised him to marry so that he might produce a legitimate heir.¹⁴ The merchant had apparently become well acquainted with Dianora and her children. He chose the sixteen-year-old Margherita as his wife, fully confident (if we are to believe his letters home to Prato) that his friendship with her family would ensure the success of this marriage. "I know them and they know me. We have been friends for a long time and I know them better than anyone else," he wrote.¹⁵ In many ways Francesco's judgment proved to be sound, but if he chose Margherita for the intelligence, moral integrity, and good sense that emerge clearly from her correspondence, he may have underestimated the effects of his own quick temper and strong will on a similarly disposed person. In 1381 Francesco praised his wife to his brother-in-law, Niccolò dell'Ammannato Tecchini, as respectful, obedient, and without undue pride in her no-

12. Luciana Frangioni, *Chiedere e ottenere: L'approvvigionamento di prodotti di successo della bottega Datini di Avignone nel XIV secolo* (Florence: Opuslibri, 2002).

13. Christiane Villain-Gandossi, *Comptes du sel (Libro di ragione e conto di salle) de Francesco di Marco Datini pour sa compagnie d'Avignon, 1376-1379* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1969).

14. For a brief biography of Francesco Datini, see Federigo Melis, *Aspetti della vita economica medievale*, vol. 1 (Siena: Monte dei Paschi di Siena, 1962), ch. 1.

15. *Le lettere di Margherita Datini*, 4.

ble Gherardini blood.¹⁶ Letters Margherita wrote several years later suggest that she outgrew such youthful modesty and malleability, if there was ever any truth in Francesco's boast. She was certainly aware of her aristocratic lineage and was not averse to pointing out her husband's more humble background when he annoyed her (letter 12).

Dianora Gherardini seems to have shared aspects of her daughter's robust temperament. Her amicable relationship with her son-in-law in the early period of their acquaintance was soured by later conflicts about money. In 1384 she demanded an exorbitant price when Francesco asked to rent her house in Florence. Eventually she bequeathed the property to Iacopo di Cianghella Girolli da Cantagallo, the husband of Margherita's sister Isabetta. Iacopo, or Giachi as he was known (letter 12), was in financial trouble by early 1386. Dianora's decision to leave the Florentine house to Isabetta and her spouse was probably influenced by the fact that she lived with them in Avignon and shared the consequences of the couple's ill fortune.¹⁷ Even on her deathbed in May 1388, Dianora Gherardini remained resolute that she owed nothing to Francesco or to her other son-in-law, Niccolò dell'Ammannato Tecchini. When Giachi and Isabetta tried to sell the Florentine house after Dianora's death, their relatives in Tuscany challenged the will and impeded the sale for many years.¹⁸ Francesco claimed that he was owed money from the disputed estate because he had never received his wife's dowry.¹⁹ Margherita apparently felt some bitterness about the financial dealings of her natal family, whose behavior, she claimed, she could never fully reveal to her husband. In a letter of 1399 to her brother, Bartolomeo Bandini, Margherita reminded him that of all the siblings, she alone had received nothing from her father's estate.²⁰

16. Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato: Francesco di Marco Datini 1335–1410* (New York: Knopf, 1957), 193–94.

17. See Jérôme Hayez, "Un facteur siennois de Francesco di Marco Datini: Andrea di Bartolomeo di Ghino et sa correspondance (1383–1389)," *Bollettino dell'Opera del vocabolario italiano* 10 (2005): 203–397 (236–37).

18. See Margherita's letters 12 and 20.

19. Francesco Datini's will mentions the fact that Margherita's dowry was never paid by her family. See Mazzei, *Lettere di un notaro*, 1:27–28.

20. Margherita's letter to her brother is translated in the notes to letter 211.

A Note on the Translation

The letters of Margherita Datini present the modern translator with daunting challenges. The most obvious of these is the difficulty of finding an appropriate register in contemporary English to convey her lively and colloquial late-fourteenth-century Tuscan. As discussed above, Margherita was largely self-educated. Although her active role in her husband's affairs and her shrewd intelligence gave her an intuitive grasp of epistolary communication, the results of her linguistic improvisation as she dictated range from the strikingly articulate to the somewhat chaotic. The poor calligraphy of letters in Margherita's own hand, particularly the very early example of February 1388 (letter 17), was from lack of formal training; but the variations in spelling and grammatical forms were not. As Luca Serianni points out, from at least the eleventh and twelfth centuries the fluctuating influences of Lucca and Florence on Prato's linguistic development encouraged linguistic polymorphism, even in documents from the same hand.¹ Both Margherita and her scribes, themselves sometimes inexperienced as letter writers and likely to write colloquially, used elements of competing dialects rather erratically. Sometimes it is a matter of educated guesswork to identify subject and object in a sentence, or the correct attribution of adjectives whose suffixes do not distinguish singular and plural, or masculine and feminine. For verbs, there is sometimes no distinction between first and third person in the present tense; some first-person plurals coincide in present and perfect tenses; and uses of the conditional are often problematic.²

1. See Luca Serianni, *Testi pratesi della fine del Duecento e dei primi del Trecento* (Florence: Accademia della Crusca, 1977), 94–98.

2. A number of these linguistic differences, characteristic of early Italian, are explored in "Linguistica e italiano antico," a special issue of *Lingua e stile*, ed. Lorenzo Renzi and Antonietta Bisetto, 35, no. 4 (2000). Also important to our interpretations were Serianni, *Testi pratesi*; Neli Radanova-Kuseva and Maria Kitova-Vasileva, "L'espressione della posteriorità nell'italiano e nello spagnolo del Trecento," *Studia slavica hungarica* 35 (1989): 133–47; Neli Radanova-Kuseva, "Sui valori del condizionale nell'antico italiano (il Trecento)," *Rassegna italiana di linguistica applicata* 19 (1987): 55–65; and Outi Merisalo, "L'omissione del relativizzatore che nel toscano del fine Trecento alla luce delle lettere di Francesco Datini," *Neu-philologische Mitteilungen* 101 (2000): 279–85.

The everyday vocabulary used in these letters has been little studied. A significant number of the words do not appear in Salvatore Battaglia's authoritative multi-volume dictionary, the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, or in the still-incomplete online dictionary of early Italian, the *Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini* (TLIO). For the sake of readability, we have not been too fastidious in interpreting passages where such words appear. We have sometimes had to blur the contrasts between eloquent passages and those that are less assured; a number of letters have therefore been rendered more smoothly and coherently in English than in the Italian. It would, in any case, be folly to attempt replication of mistakes and irregularities from the original text, or to mimic those paragraphs that are, in effect, long single sentences with many "ands." Such are the inevitable features of hurriedly dictated, unrevised letters. These long, breathless passages conjure the atmosphere of bustling household activity and the haste characterizing their composition; but they do not make for easy reading, so we have broken some of them up while retaining others to give a sense of the original. We have also judiciously summoned up colloquialisms to convey idiomatic flavor. English has lost its native distinction, observed with great subtlety by Shakespeare, between optional second-person singular forms; so we could not mirror Italian's familiar *tu* ("thou") and polite *voi* (a borrowed plural; "you, ye"). Margherita's choices of pronoun are erratic in any case, and the variations are not necessarily significant. Margherita used *tu* to address her husband, but sometimes the scribes, especially Francesco's more senior associates, wrote *voi* to be more formally correct.

Costume historians might find the translation somewhat lacking in precision, where our decision to use current English ruled out exact English equivalents from the specialized vocabulary of fourteenth-century clothing. We have preferred generic words such as "overgown" for the familiar *cioppa* seen in contemporary paintings of both men and women. Those interested in the precise details of clothing and textiles from this period must return to the Italian text.

We have left most terms for currency and weights and measures untranslated, as well as common titles indicating rank and occupation. General meanings will be clear from the context, supplemented by Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. There are many references to time

of day in the letters. Margherita's contemporaries used the traditional seven canonical hours as marked by the ringing of church bells: matins, prime, terce, sext, nones, vespers, and compline; but they also increasingly referred to solar hours. We have preserved the distinction between these two systems, and given some details in Appendix 2.

One needs to be both a period historian and a linguist to penetrate some of Margherita's more elusive meanings. Sometimes the text becomes intelligible only in light of information from Francesco's replies, or from other correspondence such as Lapo Mazzei's.³ Occasionally the difficulties defeated us, despite generous help from colleagues—especially from Jérôme Hayez, whose own archival research on the vast Datini collection resolved a number of perplexities for us as we unraveled the comings and goings of the many characters.

We hope our English translation of Margherita Datini's letters will bring this rich correspondence to the attention of a wider public, and increase awareness of the lives, education, and aspirations of women of the mercantile class in the late-medieval period, through a rare view of one woman's use of the epistolary genre. All translation is interpretation; but we trust we have interpreted this unique collection in a way that is true to its lively essence.

Carolyn James and Antonio Pagliaro

3. Although we have included some excerpts from Francesco's letters in the footnotes, these are necessarily brief and do not give a full sense of the couple's exchanges over time. Antonio Pagliaro is translating Francesco's letters to Margherita so that the complete Datini marital correspondence will be available in English.

Letter 1 (1401880)**23 January 1384****Florence**

In the name of God. Amen. Written on the 23rd day of the month.¹

Margherita commends herself to you and hopes very much to see you as well and as happy as she is. I have had Master Giovanni examine Ghirigora.² He has lanced her boil which was the biggest she has ever had and now she should be fine. I gave the doctor a florin. I had Bartolomea examined for the same problem and we'll do whatever has to be done.³ The carter has been here and brought a load of

1. [The main range of footnotes begins here; all cross-references will refer to notes within this range.] From January 1384 until the spring of 1386, Francesco Datini was often in Pisa, where he had set up a branch of his company (letters 1–15). Pisa was important to his import and export business because it facilitated communication northward with Genoa and the rest of the Mediterranean. Francesco had to spend long periods there due to the difficulties associated with establishing his company in the city's volatile political climate and against fierce commercial competition. At first he suggested that Margherita join him in Pisa, but their continuing discussion about this proposition in the early letters came to nothing, and they were sometimes separated for weeks at a time. Margherita was occasionally in Prato but mostly in Florence during this phase of their correspondence. In this first letter, Margherita stresses the dangers that overwork and the lack of a proper domestic routine posed for Francesco's health, a theme that will become familiar in their exchanges. Not until letter 7 does Margherita sign off explicitly at the end of her dictated letter: "From your Margherita, in Prato." The letters shift between the voice of Margherita herself and the scribe's, referring to Margherita in the third person. These shifts will be noted only where they are of independent interest.

2. Ghirigora, a young servant who had accompanied the Datini couple from Avignon, bore Francesco's son in September 1387. The merchant provided her with a dowry and arranged her marriage to Cristofano di Mercato di Giunta, his distant relative, when she was in the early stages of pregnancy. The baby died at six months and was buried in March 1388 among Francesco's ancestors in the church of San Francesco. See Monte Angiolini's letter of 5 March 1388, informing Francesco of the child's death, transcribed in Enrico Vivarelli, "Aspetti della vita economica pratese nel XIV secolo: con trascrizione delle 459 lettere di Monte d'Andrea Angiolini di Prato" (*Tesi di Laurea*, University of Florence, 1987), 568. The doctor, Giovanni di Banduccio, often treated members of the Datini household. Francesco provided financial help to Giovanni's son, Bandino, during his medical studies. See Melis, *Aspetti della vita economica medievale*, 1:91, n. 3.

3. Francesco regarded the slave Bartolomea as unreliable and in need of constant supervision. Bartolomea is also mentioned in letters 3, 7, 9, 10, and 17, and in Francesco's early

wood from Prato and said he will bring another on Monday. I asked him how the work was going at Prato and he said the fireplace was finished and they had started the whitewashing.⁴ The carter also said that they want the flour that was sifted in Florence taken there. In my view it would be better to leave it here; but if they insist, it should be taken to the farm. Bernabò was here and said that the mason had started work on the walls. I asked him if he was giving the mason an allowance for meals. He replied that he was providing breakfast and a snack and he thought it was necessary to give him dinner. It seemed to me that you had said the opposite.⁵

I asked Bernabò about whom he had left the key to the wine cellar with and he told me he had left it with Monte.⁶ It seems to me you should write to Monte and tell him to lock up that wine so it can't be accessed easily, since I think Bernabò would be a poor guardian. You have sent me a message to keep a close eye on the household goods. I have looked after them better than you could have wished; but I urge you to do the same there since there is no need to worry about things here. If you are worried, I would advise you to come back and watch over them yourself, since you would watch them better than anyone. That's what my heart would tell me to do in order to have peace of mind. You sent a message that it seems to you a thousand years until it

letters. See Cecchi, ed., *Le lettere di Francesco Datini*. Hereafter, this edition will be cited as FD, followed by the letter number. Francesco sold Bartolomea in May 1388 for fifty-six florins. This met with the disapproval of his aunt, Monna Tina di Betto Ridolfi, who seems to have lived near the Datini residence and often supervised Bartolomea. Monte Angiolini to Francesco Datini, 6, 22, and 29 May 1388, in Vivarelli, "Aspetti della vita economica pratese," 624, 631–33.

4. Margherita refers here to the enlargement and embellishment of the Datini residence in Prato, which continued for the rest of the decade. See Cavaciocchi, "The Merchant and Building."

5. Domenico di Giovanni Golli, known as Bernabò, was Francesco's employee from 1376 to 1406. He owned some land in Prato and spent periods of time in Rome between 1383 and 1392. See letters 13, 14, and 100. Discussion about preventing theft from the house in Prato during its construction is perennial in the correspondence.

6. Monte d'Andrea di Ser Gino Angiolini, from an old Pratese family, was Francesco's business associate in Prato between early January 1384 and 15 March 1390, when he was murdered in Pisa. Monte was married to Lorita di Aldobrandino Bovattieri. See his letters transcribed in Vivarelli, "Aspetti della vita economica pratese."

is Carnival time. I feel the same; if you can stay here a little longer once you get back, I don't think it would do any harm. I would be surprised if [Pisa] were more than a day's travel from here.

You sent a message saying it was midnight when you wrote that letter, and if you had there what you are used to, you wouldn't have stayed up so late. But that is nonsense. It seems to me that you always used to stay up later than anyone and you have never worried about it as far as I know. I am more teased than a newlywed, and they say things to me that they would not even say to a new bride. If I am sad, they say I am jealous. If I am happy, they say I can't be missing Francesco di Marco. They talk such rubbish that if you were a young boy it would be bad enough. In this household all they do is joke about you and me.

Don't keep wearing yourself out and having dinner at midnight as you usually do, or at least have some consideration for the rest of the household. I won't say anything else. May God protect you. I commend myself to you. Greet Monna Bartolomea and tell her from me that she is doing penance for her past. If she is regretting it, tell her I would probably have acted as she did.⁷ I didn't send for Sera's and Stoldo's wheat because it has a musty taste and makes dark bread. We got only one *moggio*. If you want us to get the rest let me know. I think we need to buy twelve bushels of the finest that can be found for Lent. If you celebrate Carnival take care not to get gout again. Written by Michele in Florence.

To Francesco di Marco da Prato himself, in Pisa.

Received from Florence, 31 January 1384. Answered.

7. Monna Bartolomea seems to have been Francesco's housekeeper in Pisa. Margherita may refer here to the difficulties that Bartolomea faced in trying to serve her exacting and irascible master.

Letter 2 (1401892)

4 April 1384

Florence

In the name of God. Amen.

Francesco, Monna Margherita commends herself to you. It seems to me that these guardians are inclined to take a different view. They don't want to cooperate at all and are insisting that Mattea agree, this very day, to their guardianship; so we have lost no time in summoning you.⁸ Therefore, I really beg you to come without inconveniencing yourself as soon as you can. This I beg of you.

I have nothing else to add.

To Francesco di Marco in Prato.

Received from Florence, 5 April 1384.

Letter 3 (1401715)

7 February 1385

Prato

In the name of God. 7 February 1385.

Francesco di Marco, Monna Margherita commends herself to you. The reason I write this letter is to ask whether you would like me to send Simone back to you, because I don't need him here.⁹ Let me know if you want him. You should know that the evening you left Pra-

8. Niccolò d'Ugucione, his wife Mattea, and their children were living in Florence at the time of Niccolò's death in 1384. Francesco first knew the family in Avignon, and Monna Margherita di Michele Barducci now asked him to help her daughter Mattea, by ensuring that she and her children received a proper share of Niccolò's estate (Archivio di Stato, Prato, Archivio Datini, 1095, 134897; hereafter cited as ASPo, D; information provided by Jérôme Hayez). This brief letter implies that the widow Mattea was involved in a dispute with Florentine officials over their attempt to assume the guardianship of her children and perhaps the administration of her husband's estate.

9. Simone d'Andrea Bellandi, Francesco's cousin, worked in the warehouse in Prato as a young apprentice for three years after March 1384. See Melis, *Aspetti della vita economica medievale*, 1:284. He was often Margherita's scribe in this early period of his career.

to, Nero and all his family arrived here at the Ave Maria. This evening the wet nurse of Monna Beatrice's boy, who was very ill, visited us.¹⁰

We will offer hospitality to everyone on your behalf. Dolce and Nero are here, and they take care of everything we need; so if you need Simone, write to us, and we will send him.

I have bought a twelve-yard length of linen costing a florin; the man we bought it from did not have any more.

We will buy the rest as soon as we can. For my part, I want to beg you to look after your health and avoid this staying up till all hours, because at this stage you shouldn't worry yourself so. May God protect you. Commend me to Niccolò dell'Ammannato and to Giachi.¹¹ Greet Francesca for me, and all her children.¹² Remember what Niccolò dell'Ammannato says about women in the Marches.¹³ Greet Bartolomea for me, and tell her from me to make sure that she serves

10. Nero di Vanni da Vernio and his family arrived at the Datini household in Prato at about seven in the evening. Nero and his daughter-in-law Beatrice were preparing to travel by boat from Pisa to Avignon, where Beatrice's husband, Iacopo del Nero, worked as an apothecary. The family had been briefly united in Prato between January 1383 and March 1384. On Iacopo del Nero, see Jérôme Hayez, "Tucte sono patrie, ma la buona è quella dove l'uomo fa bene". Famille et migration dans la correspondance de deux marchands toscans vers 1400," *Eloignement géographique et cohésion familiale (XVe-XXe siècle)*, ed. Jean-François Chauvard and Christine Lebeau (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2006): 69–95. See also letter 4. Both Monte Angiolini and Francesco undertook to ensure the well-being of Iacopo's relatives in Prato during his stay in Avignon. See Jérôme Hayez, "Veramente io spero farci bene ...": Expérience de migrant et pratique de l'amitié dans la correspondance de maestro Naddino d'Aldobrandino Bovattieri médecin toscan d'Avignon (1385–1407)," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 159 (2001): 425.

11. Niccolò dell'Ammannato Tecchini was married to Margherita's sister Francesca, while Iacopo di Cianghelo Girolli da Cantagallo (or Giachi, a Provençal form of Iacopo) was married to Isabetta, her other sister. Giachi had accompanied the Datini couple from Avignon to Prato in 1382. By 1386, he was in financial trouble and required Francesco's help to return to Avignon. See letters 12 and 14, and Melis, *Aspetti della vita economica medievale*, 52.

12. Margherita refers to her sister.

13. Niccolò dell'Ammannato wrote to Francesco that the women in the Marches region of Italy said to their husbands at parting, "Remember your home!" See Origo, *The Merchant of Prato*, 174.

you well. The neighbors say that it is very quiet here without Bartolomea.¹⁴ The bearer of this letter is Guccio d'Alesso.¹⁵

To Francesco di Marco da Prato, at the Loggia of the Tornaquinci.

Letter 4 (1401882)

23 February 1385

Prato

In the name of God. 23 February 1385.

Francesco di Marco, Margherita commends herself to you. We are all well by the grace of God.

We are sending to you, with Argomento, the overgown, the purple mantle, a pair of your shoes, and also some pills.¹⁶ We would have sent you some peas and chickpeas if Argomento had been able to stay longer. If you need any let us know. I beg you not to stay up late and not to be too anxious. Make sure that you look after your health during Lent.

Greet Monna Beatrice and everyone else there. May God protect them all.

With this letter you will receive two others addressed to Monna Dianora.¹⁷ Give them to Monna Beatrice and tell her to look after them well, because I wouldn't feel like doing them again for a year. We are sending some clothes wrapped in a sheet. Make sure you send the sheet back here. Tell Monna Beatrice that I am going to visit her daughter this morning.¹⁸

14. The troublesome slave Bartolomea had moved to Florence to serve Francesco.

15. This is Guccio d'Alesso Pratesini Sassoli. On the Sassoli family, see Fiumi, *Demografia, movimento urbanistico e classi sociali in Prato*, 454, 477–78.

16. Argomento di Perotto was a regular carrier of letters and goods between Florence and Prato until at least 1408. He was an ex-slave who had been freed by Francesco.

17. Margherita refers to her mother, Dianora Gherardini, who lived in Avignon.

18. On 25 November 1384, Monna Beatrice bore a daughter who was baptized with the names Piera Caterina, after one of her godfathers, Piero Borsaio, and Saint Catherine of Alexandria, on whose feast day she was born. Francesco was another of the godfathers.

May God protect you.
Written on 23 February.

To Francesco di Marco, in Pisa. Delivered.
Received from Prato, 23 February 1385.

Letter 5 (1401881)
27 February 1385
Florence

In the name of God. 27 February 1385.

I, Margherita, received your letter and read it gladly. You wrote to me as well as to Monte; because we received your letter before Monte received his, he will let me know your latest instructions. I gather that you would be happy if I were there with the whole household you have entrusted to me. You are far too kind, because I am not worthy of such honor.¹⁹

I am completely willing to come, not only to Pisa, but to the end of the earth if it makes you happy. You say that we would be better off together than one here and the other there. This is true for several rea-

See Monte Angiolini to Francesco Datini, 28 November 1384, Vivarelli, "Aspetti della vita economica pratese," 92–93. The child was left in the care of a wet nurse when Beatrice left Prato to join her husband in Avignon. Margherita undertook to keep an eye on her. See letter 5. The boat in which Beatrice traveled from Pisa was attacked by pirates, delaying her arrival in Avignon. See a reference to this incident in a letter of 5 June 1385, from the doctor Naddino d'Aldobrandino Bovattieri to Francesco Datini, in Hayez, "Veramente io spero farci bene . . ." 433 and 486. For another letter concerning the same incident, see Robert Brun, "Annales avignonnaises de 1382 à 1410: extraites des Archives de Datini," *Mémoires de l'Institut Historique de Provence* 12 (1935): 79–80. Naddino (whose family originated from Vernio, just north of Prato) sent news from Avignon regularly. See his letters published in Hayez, "Veramente io spero farci bene . . ." *passim*.

19. Margherita refers to a letter that Francesco wrote to Monte Angiolini, in which he said: "Tell Margherita that she is as she is and people may say what they like; but I am not about to leave or to remain anywhere without her, and whatever anyone says I don't feel myself without her." Francesco to Monte Angiolini in Prato, 13 March 1385, ASPo, D.347.6/4011. See also FD 1. Monte replied to Francesco that when he read this section to Margherita, the servant Ghirigora laughed heartily. See Vivarelli, "Aspetti della vita economica pratese," 128.

sons: because of the expense, because it is true that we spend a fortune here and there, although that would not matter if you were content. It seems to me that to finish off your business there it would be best if I joined you soon so that you could more easily concentrate on your affairs. I believe that you are poorly looked after there, and so it seems necessary that I should come urgently to ensure that you are looked after properly. When you are attended to as you should be, you can better dedicate yourself to your affairs. I am very worried about you because it is Lent and because of the bad air there, so I have decided to come to make sure you are as well looked after as you are accustomed to be.²⁰ It would be very easy for you to catch yet another illness if you are not cared for properly.

My main concern is to ensure you remain in good health, because as long as you are healthy we will prosper and be able to sustain any great expense. This is why I cannot wait to be there, so you will be able to live more happily. So I will come. You write that if I did not wish to come there, you would come here at Easter and travel back and forth as necessary.²¹ Apart from being very dangerous, such coming and going would make you waste time and prolong your stay there. So, also because of the bad air there, I would like to come immediately.

That would allow you to finish what you have to do. Whatever else might happen, I would not like you to be there when the weather is very hot, because every year there are deaths. About this I will say no more. You are wise and will make the best decision. Remaining there or coming here is your decision.

Concerning your foster mother, I have spoken with Monte, and he tells me that he will organize things in consultation with the Prior of San Fabiano, Arriguccio di Ser Guido, and with you.²² I said I was willing to agree with them on whatever sum they want to spend, be-

20. Pisa was notoriously unhealthy because of the marshy areas around the city and had been depopulated in 1382 by a serious outbreak of plague.

21. See FD 1.

22. Francesco's foster mother, Monna Piera di Pratese Boschetti, looked after him and his brother after the death of their parents during the plague of 1348. She died on 1 February 1383. Margherita refers here to arrangements for Monna Piera's tomb in the twelfth-century abbey of San Fabiano in Prato. It was to be organized by Arriguccio di Ser Guido Ferra-

cause I believe they want to do it honorably. In my opinion, you can agree with what the Prior wants to do because he must act honorably. Should he do anything else, I think it would bring them little credit, and it would be a disgrace to bury her as if she were just anybody. There have been bigger [tombs] but it seems to me it would be sufficient to do what is usually done. You will be here and can do as you see fit.²³ Concerning your aunt and all the others I won't reply because I hope you will be here soon and I will tell you my opinion in person.

You don't need to worry about the women in the household here. I supervise them more than you would do yourself.²⁴ They have behaved themselves exceedingly well. I pay more attention to Bartolomea than I would to you if you were here. I decided not to send you any of the things that you need there because it seemed better to send everything together.

When you are here you will have a clearer idea of what has to be done. I received a letter from Niccolò dell'Ammannato. He puts himself at my disposal. I wrote to tell him that you wanted me to be with you, and I asked him for his opinion because I said I would follow first your commands and then his. I did this to honor him like a father.

Monna Dianora has sent a power of attorney for you and for Niccolò because she wants you to sell the house and to know whether I agree. I replied that I did not wish to lose the right to it under any

canì (Gonfalonier of Justice of Prato in that period), Monte Angiolini, and the prior of the church.

23. Monna Piera's bequest of her house to Francesco to pay for her burial was contested by the prior of San Domenico, the executor of her husband's will, which left this property to the hospital. In a letter of 23 February 1383 to Francesco, Monte Angiolini refers to the burial of Monna Piera as costing thirty-six *lire*. Vivarelli, "Aspetti della vita economica pratese," 3–4. The Magistracy of the Eight Defenders in Prato appointed Messer Manetto to examine the matter, and it appears that Francesco's claim was considered weaker. See Monte d'Andrea to Francesco, 12 October 1384, Vivarelli, "Aspetti della vita economica pratese," 59–61. In November 1384, Monte referred to the continuing debate about who would pay this money. See Vivarelli, "Aspetti della vita economica pratese," 84–86.

24. In his letter of 23 February 1385 Francesco wrote: "Now don't make me get angry with you. You can't go wrong if you keep a close eye and it won't be difficult for you. But take care of everything and pay attention to the house and the servants, not to the loom or needlework which couldn't make up in a hundred years what you might lose in an hour. Now try to be a woman, not a girl. Soon you'll be entering your twenty-fifth year" (FD 1).

circumstances, but it was not my decision, and I would be satisfied by what you and Niccolò did about it.²⁵

I presented your compliments to all the people you indicated, and I was particularly courteous to Messer Giovanni di Lippo.²⁶ Everyone received me very graciously. I am sending you a lot of things; the list of all the items that I am sending is with this letter. That's all I have to say. I saw Beatrice's children and made a fuss of them and told them to consider themselves my own children.²⁷ As for what you say about the herrings, I don't think I should do it, because there will be plenty of time for us to give them away later. Monte says the quality is rather inferior. I am well, as is the rest of the household. Think of me. Please don't overdo it. Work at a pace you can keep up.

May God protect you always.

To Francesco di Marco da Prato, in Pisa.

Received from Florence, 29 February 1385.

Letter 6 (1401891)

1 March 1385

Prato

In the name of God. Amen. 1 March 1385.

I am sending to you with Argomento the carter half a quart of chickpeas, half a quart of peas, half a quart of beans, a good quantity of capers, a quart of chestnuts, plenty of figs, a jar of raisins, four hand

25. Dianora Gherardini's house in the quarter of Santo Spirito in Florence was a source of tension within the family. Francesco tried to rent it from her in 1387, but she demanded an exorbitant price, and her son-in-law found another house. It was eventually bequeathed to Margherita's sister Isabetta and her husband, Giachi Girolli; but Dianora's will was contested by other family members, and Isabetta was still trying to sell the house in 1395. See Naddino's letters to Francesco published in Hayez, "Veramente io spero farci bene . . ." 510–11, 526–27.

26. Giovanni di Lippo Benamati acted as Francesco's lawyer in the dispute over Monna Piera's will.

27. See note 18, above.

towels, two sets of underlinen, a large towel, and a set of Simone's underlinen.

If you need anything else, let me know. I await your arrival.²⁸
May God protect you.

Your wife Margherita commends herself to you.

To Francesco di Marco himself, in Pisa.

Received from Prato, 2 March 1385.

Letter 7 (1401716)

31 July 1385

Prato

In the name of God. 31 July 1385.

Francesco, Margherita commends herself to you. You sent a message with Niccolò telling me to prepare myself to come there and to sell the wine. I haven't yet found anyone who wants either the white or the red wine. I remind Bettino every day; you know what he is like.²⁹ It would be necessary for Bartolomea to be here before we could leave, because there is a lot of dirty washing that must be done because there are so many mice here that they would do too much damage. Since you have decided to stay there, the sooner we are together the better. We will be better off together than one here and the other there. I would not be happy to stay here without you.³⁰ Be careful what Bar-

28. In a letter of 10 March (FD 2), Francesco promised to come to Prato as soon as possible to discuss with Margherita whether she should return with him to Pisa. He kept his promise, but on 23 March he left for Pisa without his wife, remaining there until 18 July. See Melis, *Aspetti della vita economica medievale*, 173–95. Letter 7 suggests that she did not join him in Pisa. See also note 30, below.

29. Francesco responded to this letter on 4 August, saying that he only put up with Bettino for the sake of Bettino's wife, Monna Tina, who was Francesco's aunt (FD 3). Francesco employed Bettino to supply firewood, wine, and other household commodities. He seems to have been often in debt and was harassed by the authorities for insolvency.

30. Francesco reassured his wife that he was not content to live without her: "It is certainly my intention that Bartolomea should go soon to Prato to do the washing and put everything in order. We will stay here in Florence until mid-September and then we will return to Prato

tolomea does with my lengths of cloth. She is as likely as not to ruin them. I would have asked for Simone if I thought you would send him, but I know he is needed there to look after the key. I would have had him sell this wine by sending him out and about, because I have no one else to send.

Try to come as soon as you can. Remember your home and what Niccolò dell'Ammannato said so that I may have peace of mind.³¹ Tinuccia is better now.³² I have nothing else to add for now. May God protect you always. Commend me to our friends and answer this letter, telling me which day you are arriving, because I want to welcome you properly. You could bring Niccolò dell'Ammannato, although he would not leave his serving girl behind.

From your Margherita, in Prato.

To Francesco di Marco da Prato at the Loggia of the Tornaquinci in Florence.

Received from Prato, 3 August 1385. Answered.

Letter 8 (1401883)

17 December 1385

Florence

In the name of God. Amen. 17 December 1385.

Francesco, Margherita sends you her greetings from Florence. I am writing this letter because I really want to know what you did about that business relating to Paolo da Pistoia.³³ Please avoid wor-

and stay there until All Saints' Day. Then, if it pleases God, we will go to Pisa. This time I want to give us the opportunity to rest. You can see how matters are going" (FD 3). Francesco moved to Pisa without Margherita before 16 December 1385.

31. See note 13, above.

32. Tinuccia may be Margherita's niece Caterina (Tina) di Niccolò dell'Ammannato Tucchini. She later joined the Datini household (see letter 28, for example) and was betrothed to Francesco's partner Luca del Sera on 20 May 1403.

33. Paolo d'Andrea della Torre was a merchant who had worked in Avignon. Francesco had a lawsuit against him in Pisa.

rying about it as much as you can, though these things always bring anxiety. You must act in accordance with your conscience. This is more important than all the things we must put up with. I will say no more about this. Try to control yourself. Leave justice to the Lord God, who knows better than we how to sort out such matters. You will be vindicated once more, just as you were in the past when others wronged you. Above all, I beg you not to get angry, because we are doing well and it is not right to throw away so much good to satisfy that man. That would be doing a favor to a person who wishes us ill. God has shown us great favor. May God bestow His grace on us, and may we be thankful.

We are all well. Monna Giovanna and Tieri's niece are here with me, and I had the mantle for Tieri's mother made and the overgown for his niece.³⁴

Commend me to Monna Parte and to Michele; embrace Tina for me.³⁵ Ask Monna Parte if she wants me to send her the cloth as it is, or to wait until the weather improves because it hasn't stopped raining here. What does she want me to do?

Monna Giovanna and Francesca send a hundred thousand greetings. I'll put Bartolomea in charge of grooming the mule. It will do fine that way. It often has such heavy loads that the poor thing looks as if it has been in the wars. I've nothing else to add. May God protect you always.

I tried to send you some underlinen, and I sent one set to Prato, but you had already gone. I will try to send you a set there [in Pisa] if I can find someone to bring it, because you must be in need of it.

To Francesco di Marco da Prato himself, in Pisa.

Received from Florence, 18 December 1385.

34. Monna Giovanna was Margherita's aunt. She was the daughter of Donato Bandini and widow of Salvestro di Cantino Cavalcanti. Tieri di Benci da Settignano worked for Francesco Datini in Avignon from 1371 and became his partner in 1382. See Melis, *Aspetti della vita economica medievale*, 136–41.

35. Monna Parte, Michele di Carlo, and the couple's daughter Tina (or Caterina) (see letter 9, and FD 4), were friends who lived in Pisa. In his letter of 16 December 1385 (FD 4), Francesco refers to the mother and daughter spending the night of his return to Pisa in his house, presumably to cook for him. Margherita returned the favor by organizing the dyeing of some cloth for Monna Parte.