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**PER POPOLO E PER CONFINI:  
FLORENTINE TAVOLA DELLE POSSESSIONI  
AND THE PROPERTY REGISTRATION IN THE MIDDLE  
OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY\***

**Abstract**

In the mid-fourteenth century, the authorities of Florence resolved to establish registers of all the real properties within the Florentine dominion. A project, unprecedented in the Florentine history, to record and compile an inventory of estates was conceived. The article considers the circumstances behind the project, primarily the socioeconomic and political factors that drove the authorities' decision. Details are discussed regarding the selection of officials responsible for the project and the work they did. Analysis of the project in question enables to address certain specific issues of late medieval perception and rationalisation of urban and off-urban space.

**Keywords:** real estate inventories, Florence, late medieval Italian cities, descriptions of urban and off-urban space, descriptive cartography, *contado*

I  
INTRODUCTION

In the middle of the fourteenth century, the Florentine authorities decided to establish inventory of all the pieces of real property situated within the dominion of Florence; this marked an unprecedented move

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in the city's history.<sup>1</sup> Albeit the project ended up a dozen years later in complete failure, it has to be considered important in terms of a social, economic, and political-system transition that took place in Florence at that time. I herein below consider the circumstances behind the initiative, discussing the socioeconomic and political factors that might have had a bearing on the authorities' decision and analysing in detail the *provvisioni* regarding the *tavola delle possessioni* of the 1340s and 1350s. This scope of analysis enables to capture the distinctive characteristics of the Florentine project, as compared to some others late medieval realty inventory initiatives in north-central Italy, which were strictly connected with the local reforms of the fiscal system and collection of direct taxes.<sup>2</sup>

In the period under research, when it came to keeping inventories (of any sort) by communal institutions, the local traditions and already-implemented solutions had the decisive bearing on the form applied and the data-arrangement system. Analysis of the Florentine *tavola delle possessioni* allows to take note of the descriptive cartography tools characteristic of this city and grasp the circumstances in which a strong need for the development of such cartography emerged, ensuing from the need to localise and describe the possessions of the city's citizens and dwellers of lands subject to Florence. My analysis of the real-property inventory project attempts at answering questions of importance to the considerations of late medieval perception and rationalisation of urban and off-urban space, namely: What

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<sup>1</sup> The most comprehensive study of Florentine *tavola delle possessioni* is a chapter in Giuseppe Canestrini's *La scienza e l'arte di stato desunta dagli atti ufficiali della repubblica fiorentina e dei Medici* (Firenze, 1862), 71–9, a work of importance to Italian historiography after the country's unification. The other relevant items include: Ugo Sorbi, *Aspetti della struttura e principali modalità di stima dei catasti senese e fiorentino del 14 e 15 secolo* (Firenze, 1962); Guidobaldo Guidi, *Il Governo della città-repubblica di Firenze del primo Quattrocento, i: Politica e diritto pubblico* (Firenze, 1981), 292–3.

<sup>2</sup> The following comparative studies deserve special attention: Enrico Fiumi, *L'imposta diretta nei Comuni medioevali della Toscana*, w: *Studi in onore di Armando Saporì*, i (Milano, 1957), 327–53; Renato Zangheri, *Catasti e storia della proprietà terrena* (Torino, 1980); Paolo Cammarosano, *Italia medievale. Struttura e geografia delle fonti* (Roma 1991), 186–9; and selected articles in Albert Rigaudière (ed.), *De l'estime au cadastre en Europe, Le Moyen Âge* (Paris, 2006).

tools and categories are used to define urban space? According to what method data is arranged? What does the designed registration system tell us about how the areas governed by the Commune of Florence were perceived? In what ways was this perception formed by the city's internal organisation?<sup>3</sup>

## II

### THE 1340S: EMERGENCE OF THE CONCEPT

In mid-April 1346, the *Signoria* of Florence<sup>4</sup> embarked on drawing up complete 'compendium of knowledge' of the real properties located within the Florentine dominion – the first such initiative in the city's history.<sup>5</sup> 11 April saw the adoption of a resolution to appoint special officers to take care of the undertaking, tasked with "finding and developing a method for taking down the real estates situated within Florence, its *contado* (Lat. *comitatus*), and the other lands subject to the commune (It. *distretto*, Lat. *districtus*)".<sup>6</sup> Eight officials altogether were to be hired to do the job, two for each of the districts, assisted by a notary elected by the city's authorities to act as their scribe; their term of office was to be three months. These functionaries were also given the right to take any measures to help deliver their mission successfully.

<sup>3</sup> This text was considerably inspired by the following: Giampaolo Francesconi and Francesco Salvestrini, 'La scrittura del confine nell'Italia comunale: modelli e funzioni', in Outi Merisalo (ed.), *Frontiers. Proceedings of the Third European Congress of Medieval Studies (Jyväskylä, 10–14 June 2003)* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2006), 197–221; Giampaolo Francesconi, 'Scrivere il contado. I linguaggi della costruzione territoriale cittadina nell'Italia centrale', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*, cxxiii (2011), Special Issue: *Les pouvoirs territoriaux en Italie*, 499–529.

<sup>4</sup> The *Signoria* consisted in the period concerned of eight guild priors and a Standard-Bearer of Justice (*Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*), advised by Twelve Good Men and sixteen standard-bearers of militia companies (*gonfalons*). Resolutions adopted by the *Signoria* were subsequently submitted to voting by city councils (Lat. *provisiones*; It. *provvisioni*), on the legislative activity of Florence in English, see Andrea Guidi, 'The Florentine archives in Transition: Government, Warfare and Communication (1289–1530ca)', *European History Quarterly*, xl (2016), 458–79.

<sup>5</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereinafter: ASF), Provvissioni Registri (hereinafter: PR) 33, 30v–31r (11 Apr. 1345); annotated: "Balia ordinandi et eligendi cives ad faciendum describi bona omnium distinctim in Registro".

<sup>6</sup> "... providere et ordinare et modum invenire qualiter domus, possessione et bona immobilia posite in civitate, comitatu et districtu Florentie scribantur et scribi possint"; *ibidem*.

The *provvisione* laid down the rules, in quite general terms, to govern the realty recording system, as submitted by anonymous citizens in a petition prior to the law enactment. Two registers were to be compiled, one for the estates within the city's limits and the other for realties in the *comitatus* and *districtus*.<sup>7</sup> Both were to be arranged by district of the city, the one regarding the lands outside the city being arranged also in terms of rural parishes (*plebatus/pieve*) within which the estate was located. By mid-fourteenth century, division of suburban areas by city district had had a long tradition behind it;<sup>8</sup> it was characteristic of the tax system (among other things) and, clearly, was

<sup>7</sup> In the period concerned, *contado* (derived from the Latin *comitatus*) referred to the land surrounding the city and subjected to its jurisdiction and fiscal system. For the significance of the city's expansion into the *contado*, see Philip Jones, *The Italian City-State: From Commune to Signoria* (Oxford, 1997), 360–70; for the meaning of the term in the preceding centuries, see Giampaolo Francesconi, 'Scrivere il contado', 499–529; on the problem of defining the *contado*, Elisabeth Carpentier, *Orvieto a la fin du XIIIe siècle. Ville et campagne dans le cadastre de 1292* (Paris, 1986), 47–60. Defining the notion of *distretto* (Lat. *districtus*), basically denoting the lands incorporated in a later period, most of which remained fairly independent, is a much more difficult exercise (the unclear distinction, for Florence, between *contado* and *distretto* has been addressed, a.o., in Guidobaldo Guidi, *Il Governo della città-repubblica*, i, 24). Samuel K. Cohn (*Creating the Florentine State: Peasants and Rebellion, 1348–1434* (Cambridge and New York, 2004), 3, fn. 9) remarks that the difference between *contado* and *distretto* tended to be resolved by the different tax encumbrances. For more on the shaping of the Florentine dominium in the fourteenth century, see Marvin B. Becker, *Florence in Transition* (Baltimore, 1968), ii, 201–50; also, Paola Benigni, *L'organizzazione territoriale dello stato fiorentino nel '300*, in Sergio Gensini (ed.), *La toscana nel secolo XIV. Caratteri di una civiltà regionale* (Pisa, 1988), 151–63; Andrea Zorzi, 'L'organizzazzazione del territorio in area fiorentina tra XIII e XIV secolo', in Giorgio Chittolini and Dietmar Willoweit (eds.), *L'organizzazione del territorio in Italia e in Germania, secoli XIII–XIV (Atti della XXXV settimana di studio organizzata dall'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento, 7–12 settembre 1992)* (Bologna, 1994), 279–349; Andrea Zorzi and William J. Connell, *Lo stato territoriale fiorentino, secoli XIV–XV. Ricerche linaguaggi, confronti. Atti del Semianatio internazionale di Studi, San Miniato, 7–8 giugno 1996* (Pisa, 2002). For Florentine *contado* see also Paolo Pirillo, *Costruzione di un contado: i Fiorentini e il loro territorio nel basso Medioevo* (Firenze, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> For the applied method of dividing the suburban areas in line with the city's districts, see Gian Maria Varanini, 'L'organizzazione del distretto cittadino nell'Italia padana nei secoli XIII–XIV (Marca Trevigiana, Lombardia, Emilia)', in G. Chittolini and D. Willoweit (eds.), *L'organizzazione del territorio in Italia e Germania: secoli XIII–XIV* (Bologna, 1994), 133–233; with regard to the north of Tuscany, see (*inter alia*) Giampaolo Francesconi and Francesco Salvestrini, '*Il Liber finium districtus Pistorii: modelli e scritture del confine in età comunale*', in P. Foschi and R. Zagnoni (eds.),

not limited to Florence.<sup>9</sup> In consequence, the suburban area, though legally very markedly separated from the urban space, was gradually subjected to the city's internal organisation and administrative division. The result was the way the commune-ruled areas were perceived, via the division characteristic of an *intra muros* space. Let us note that in this particular case the decision to record the data in terms of the by-district division consolidated the new administrative order adopted in 1343 (*quartieri*, a division into four districts, replaced the six-district arrangement, called *sestieri*) and reconfirmed its importance for the suburban areas as well.<sup>10</sup> The functioning of the commune also followed the division in question (election of the city officials, operation of court tribunals, and so on).

Along with these general rules, it was ordained that blanks (*spatia*) be left against the items (*relationes*) recorded, in case that the realty be alienated in a future. Hence, rather than offering, in a future, not only a compendium of knowledge on the condition of the realty pieces concerned as at the record date, the registers were meant to be a vivid inventory of estates within the area of Florence, to be complemented and updated on an ongoing basis. The term *relatio*, referring to the items listed, meant that the registers were to be compiled based on reports of the owners on the estates they possessed. The *provvisione* nowise specified the system of collecting the relations; what it did is that it appointed functionaries tasked with defining the system's rules.

The citizens appointed to perform the task as ordained started their three-month term-of-office on 1 May 1346; as soon as in June, their term was extended to early January 1347 due to numerous reported *discordie et litigia* occurring in the first days of their service.<sup>11</sup> In the

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*Il confine appenninico: percezione e realtà dall'età antica ad oggi* (Porretta Terme – Pistoia, 2001), 29–61; also, Francesconi, Salvestrini, *La scrittura del confine*, 220–1.

<sup>9</sup> See among others Bernardino Barbadoro, *Le finanze della repubblica fiorentina: imposta diretta e debito pubblico fino all'istituzione del Monte* (Firenze, 1929) is still the best monographic study of the fourteenth-century Florentine tax and taxation system; also, see David Herlihy, 'Direct and Indirect Taxation in Tuscan Urban Finance, ca. 1200–1400', in *idem*, *Cities and Society in Medieval Italy* (London, 1980), 385–405.

<sup>10</sup> ASF, Capitoli, Registri, Protocolli 4, 46r–v, 'Divisio civitatis per quarterios'; see *I Capitoli del Comune di Firenze. Inventario e regesto*, ed. by Cesare Guasti and Alessandro Gherardi, ii (Firenze, 1893), 57.

<sup>11</sup> The following were appointed: Priore ser Bartholi, Nerius Bocchucci, Cambinus Signorini, Philippus Jammori, dominus Thomasus de Altovitis, Luisius Lippi

subsequent months of 1346, the *Signoria* resolved moreover to grant a consideration to the office's notary, stipulating that he was not supposed to accept any money from those who would like to prevent their possessions from getting registered.<sup>12</sup>

The circumstances behind the initiative deserve taking a look at. The decisions made on 11 April 1346 were reportedly inspired by a supplication from 'certain' citizens of Florence that requested for setting up a register of properties and proposed general rules of recording them (as summarised above).<sup>13</sup> The main incentive behind this initiative was the difficulty to identify the proprietors of real estates within the dominion, with the resulting *questiones et scandala*, and numerous delays in the operation of court tribunals or other offices. Complaints were moreover submitted against the creditors' problems with determining their debtors' actual possessions. Marvin Becker saw the main reason behind the initiative in the urging need for precise identification of direct tax payers in the *contado* and *distretto*<sup>14</sup> (the city's citizens were exempt from the tax in the period concerned).<sup>15</sup> No such incentives are mentioned, clearly enough, in the petition as worded in the *provvisione*. If such were the reasons behind the authorities' decision, the undertaking might have raised concerns among the Florence citizens that the *estimo* could be extended to them as well. Let us remind (which Becker did not mention) that the registration of real estates was designed as a general project, meant to cover not only the *contado* but also the properties within the city's walls.

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Aldobrandini, Andreas Casini, Silvester Riccardo de Riccis; and, ser Nicholaus ser Galgani as the notary; PR 34, 54r (1 June 1346).

<sup>12</sup> The name of ser Francisco Pini appears instead of what is quoted in the aforementioned provision; PR 34, 70v (25 Aug. 1346), 92v (17 Oct. 1346). He was, in all probability, the office's new notary, as otherwise evidenced by PR 42, 93r (30 July 1355).

<sup>13</sup> As was customary, the justification was made part of the preamble to the *provvisione*; PR 34, 30v; cf. Canestrini, *La scienza*, 74.

<sup>14</sup> Author of the important political study on Florence in the 1340s, Marvin B. Becker is one of the few scholars to have studied the decade's *tavola delle possessioni* project more in depth; the information he gives should be made more specific of precise, though. See *idem*, 'Florentine Popular Government (1343–1348)', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, civ, 4 (1962), 360–82, here: 370–1.

<sup>15</sup> Collection of direct tax from the city's citizens was abolished in the early fourteenth century (1315).

Importantly, the 1346 *provvisione* clearly stated that descriptions of estates in the registers had to be free of any valuation (*extimatio*).<sup>16</sup> This term did not sound neutral: *estimo*, or the Latin *extimum* (derived from the verb *extimare*) meant evaluation of real estate in view of collection of direct tax (the tax as such was also conventionally described by this name).<sup>17</sup> The lack of *extimatio* distances the Florence project from analogous projects in the other northern Italian cities where such valuation was undertaken along with the listing of landed properties, which became the basis for assessment of tax liabilities.<sup>18</sup> However, this does not undermine the argument whereby the records of estates were interrelated with a plan for tax reform. Becker rightly takes note of a conservative attitude towards fiscal matters apparently characteristic

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<sup>16</sup> "... absque aliqua extimatione propter faciendi vel apponendi", PR 33, f. 31r; cf. Canestrini, *La scienza*, 74. Becker was apparently unaware of it as he described the results of the 1346 provisions as "an unprecedented survey and evaluation of property"; *idem*, 'Florentine Popular Government', 371.

<sup>17</sup> The term was used in Florence interchangeably with *libra/libbra* (derived from *allibrare*). On the terms related to direct taxes, see Fiumi, *L'imposta diretta*, 333–4, Pinto, 'Estimes et cadastres toscans antérieurs au cadastre de Florence 1427', in Rigaudière (ed.), *De l'estime au cadastre en Europe*, 348–9.

<sup>18</sup> See, in the first place, Fiumi, *L'imposta diretta*. Siena is the most important and most interesting example in Tuscany, as far as the registration method is concerned (I refer to it below), see Luciano Banchi: 'La lira, la Tavola delle possessioni e le Preste nella Repubblica di Siena', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, ser. 3, vii, 2 (1868), 53–88; Ildebrando Imberciatori, 'Il catasto senese del 1316', *Archivio Vittorio Scialoja per le consuetudini giuridiche, agrarie, e le tradizioni popolari*, vi (1939), 154–68; Ugo Sorbi, *Aspetti della struttura*; Giovanni Cherubini, 'Proprietari, contadini e campagne senesi all'iniziodel Trecento', in *idem*, *Signori, contadini, borghesi. Ricerche sulla società italiana del basso Medioevo* (Firenze, 1974), 313–92, and *idem*, 'La "Tavola delle possessioni" del Comune di Siena', *Rivista di storia dell'agricoltura*, xiv, 2 (1974), 5–14; William M. Bowsky, *The Finance of the Commune of Siena 1287–1355* (Oxford, 1970), 87–97; Odile Redon, *Lo spazio di una città: Siena e la Toscana meridionale (secoli XIII–XIV)* (Roma, 1999). The tax documentation of Lucca is a less investigated case; see Alessandra Potenti, 'Gli estimi guinigiani del 1411–1413: prospettive di ricerca', *Quaderni lucchesi di studio sul Medioevo e sul Rinascimento*, ii, 1 (2001), 39–74. The most recent study, which compares similar undertakings in different city-states of Tuscany, Umbria, and in Marches, with a review of the literature, is Alberto Grohmann, 'Il documento perugino nel panorama degli estimi italiani del sec. XIII', in Giuliana Albini (ed.), *Le scritture del Comune. Amministrazione e memoria nelle città dei secoli XII e XIII* (Torino, 1998), 141–54; Giuliano Pinto, *Estimes et cadastres*, 343–62; Philippe Jansen, 'In catastro ponere et scribere. Formation intellectuelle et méthodes des rédacteurs du cadastre en Italie centrale du milieu du XIII siècle au XIV siècle', in Rigaudière (ed.), *De l'estime au cadastre en Europe*, 107–34.

of Florence<sup>19</sup>: the reforms targeted at direct taxes met with strong resistance and had only been carried out under the rule of *signori*.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, the hypothesis can be proposed that recording the real properties with no assessment was a deliberate move of the authorities where the so-called *novi cives*, or *novi homines* (It. *gente nuova*) were predominant.<sup>21</sup> As a result, the fiscal apparatus would obtain a useful tool to verify the landed property, and at the same time to identify, and satisfy, the actual tax liabilities; a tool that could prove very handy in a planned attempt to impose an *estimo* upon the citizens. Putting no *extimatio* in place was possibly meant to quieten the proprietors and take a safety measure against the possible jeopardising of the project by those disturbed by the inventorying.<sup>22</sup> Their concerns might have been aggravated by the reactivated collection of direct tax from Florence's citizens and the parallel evaluation of real properties in the *contado*, initiated a few years earlier (in 1343) by Florentine *signore* Gualtieri di Brienne.<sup>23</sup>

One has to agree with Becker that the projects were underpinned by the change of government, the commune's financial problems and the attitude toward the crisis assumed by the new authorities. It is worthwhile, however, to discuss the project in question in the context

<sup>19</sup> On tax conservatism in Florence, see for instance: Becker, 'Economic Change and the Emerging of Florentine Territorial State', *Studies in the Renaissance*, xiii (1966), 10; Gene Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343–1378* (Princeton, 1962), 92.

<sup>20</sup> Reforms of the *estimo* tax and attempts to extend them on the city's citizens were associated in the first half of the fourteenth century with the rule of the *signores* Charles d'Anjou (1326) and Gualtieri di Brienne (1342–3), called in Florence 'the Duke of Athens' (Duca d'Atene); see Barbadoro, *Le finanze*, 161–8, 206–12.

<sup>21</sup> On new citizens, see Marvin B. Becker, 'An essay on the *Novi Cives* and Florentine politics, 1343–1382', *Medieval Studies*, xxiv (1962), 35–82.

<sup>22</sup> Another example should be quoted here of registration of real estates carried out by Florentine authorities in the period concerned, which for the citizens could have served as point of reference, though it concerned a completely different domain. 1343–5 saw a registration of luxury goods, costly clothes and ornaments; wearing the registered valuables was subsequently admitted, whereas exhibiting those not reported and not sealed with the commune's emblem was subject to a severe fine. Scholars tend to interpret this operation as an attempt at taxing luxury. For more on the undertaking, see Laurence Gérard-Marchant (ed.), *Draghi rossi e querce azzurre. Elenchi descrittivi di abiti di lusso (Firenze 1343–1345)* (Firenze, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Evaluation was to be carried out by commissions composed of at least 48 surveyors from outside Florence, see ASF, Camera del Comune, 1 bis, cf. Barbadoro, *Le finanze*, 210.



of the actions taken after the 1343 upheaval. Adoption of a broader perspective may shed a somewhat different light on the circumstances in which the idea emerged to create a new instrument for gaining knowledge on the legal status of the properties and defining the Florentine *dominium* for internal policy purposes.

It was in July 1343 that *signore* Gualtieri di Brienne, who had ruled Florence since 1342, was expelled from the city. After the *tiranno* was driven out and a short-lived rule of aristocracy overthrown (25 September 1343), the city guilds' elite took over the helm. It was for the first time then that it was composed of members of the seven major guilds along those of minor ones who gained influence on election of municipal officials. Many of them came from the group of new citizens, the families that had recently settled down in the town, never holding any office before. In agreement with some members of the old Florentine patricians, they formed the rule of the *popolani*, which lasted until the Black Death disaster of 1348.<sup>24</sup> The miserable standing of the communal treasury, along with bankruptcies of the grand Florentine companies, determined the actions taken by these authorities, making them carry out thorough reforms in the city.<sup>25</sup>

The new authorities launched radical control tools for communal property. After coming into power in 1343, a survey of the communal properties was initiated; the project's span was much larger than in the previous decades and severe penalties were imposed on those who usurped the right to such properties.<sup>26</sup> These actions reached

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<sup>24</sup> The best study on this particular rule is the article by Marvin B. Becker, 'Florentine Popular Government (1343–1348)' (repeatedly referred to herein).

<sup>25</sup> Among the many studies dealing with the financial crisis in Florence in the 1340s, the following are recommendable: Carlo Cipolla, *The Monetary Policy of Fourteenth-Century Florence* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1982), 1–30; Armando Saponi, 'Il quaderno dei creditori di Taddeo dell'Antella e compagni', *Rivista delle biblioteche e degli archivi*, 3 (1925), 159–80; *idem*, *La crisi delle compagnie mercantili dei Bardi e dei Peruzzi* (Florence, 1926); Edwin S. Hunt, *The Medieval Super-Companies: A Study of the Peruzzi Company of Florence* (Cambridge, 1994). Most recently, an excellent portrayal of the events around the collapse has been sketched by Lorenzo Tanzini, *1345. La bancarotta di Firenze. Una storia di banchieri, fallimenti e finanza* (Roma, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> See PR 33, 2v–3v (4 June 1344), 6r–v (9 June 1344), 16r–v (19 June 1344). According to Becker, these actions deliberately followed up the policy line initiated in 1342 by Gualtieri di Brienne who reinforced the competencies of the *ufficiali di*

their climax in May 1345, as a few grand Florentine magnate families who had for many years used the estates owned by the Commune were summoned to return these properties.<sup>27</sup> The ungratefulness (*ingratitude*) springing forth from the undertaking, the lack of respect for the old families, was criticised in harsh words by Giovanni Villani.<sup>28</sup> The real estates thus retrieved were to be listed in the commune's property registers kept by the notary of the *ufficiali della torre* – officials responsible for protection of the commune's rights to the real properties held and management of the same.<sup>29</sup> Regrettably, the office's documentation has not survived<sup>30</sup>; not much can be said of the method

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*torre* and increased the number of officials; see *idem*, *Florence in Transition* (Baltimore, 1967), 152–4; cf. *idem*, 'Florentine Popular Government', 371. However, Barbadoro earlier demonstrated that the problem was first addressed in 1341, as control of communal properties used for small fees by magnates was ordained; see Barbadoro, *Le finanze*, 241–2, 281–2; see ASF, Provvioni Duplicati 2, 12r–v.

<sup>27</sup> PR 33, 47 r–v (13 V 1345), Becker mistakenly refers to sheet no. 43 (*idem*, 'Florentine Popular Government', 371).

<sup>28</sup> Giovanni Villani (*Nuova Cronica*, ed. by G. Porta, Parma 1991, Book XIII, chap. 44: 'Come il popolo di Firenze tolse a certi grandi e gentili uomini certe possessioni e beni donati loro per lo Comune').

<sup>29</sup> "... in registro et libris comunis Florentie et maxime in libri et attis officialium et offitii qui vulgaliter appellantur gli ufficiali della torre", PR. 33, 47r (13 May 1345); it was a continuation of the documentation kept earlier on by the predecessors of the *ufficiali della torre* – so-called The Six (officials), competent in the fields of protecting the commune's rights to the real properties owned and carrying out construction projects. For their register, called the *Libro grande*, see ASF, Diplomatico, Firenze, S. Miniato al Monte (olivetani), 11 Nov. 1326; the magistracy of the Six, see Barbadoro, *Le finanze*, 258–80; Paula Spilner, *Ut civitas amplietur. Studies in Florentine Urban Development, 1282–1400*, Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University (Ann Arbor, 1987), 55–74. In 1358, the communal authorities decided that a new register be drawn up for the communal estates, based on those existing previously. It was remarked at that point, again, that real estates were to be described in *per loca, vocabula et confinia*. The work on the register was entrusted to the *ufficiali della torre*, whilst the related expenditure was to be borne by the commune; see PR 46, 64 rv. On the *della torre* office, see Barbadoro, *Le finanze*, 280–4; Spilner, *Ut civitas amplietur*, 74–8.

<sup>30</sup> The documentation of the *ufficiali della torre* has been preserved incommensurably with the actual competencies granted to the officials (cf. Barbadoro, *Le finanze*, 277); a few codices that survived until the twentieth century (ASF, Capitani di Parte Guelfa, numeri rossi) suffered from a flood that affected Florence in 1966, and presently are not available to archive visitors. The only register, called *Libro della luna* (ASF, Capitani di Parte Guelfa, numeri rossi 105), comprises the office's decisions concerns from the period 1349–1578. Owing to the damage done to it

of keeping those registers, their structure and description of properties based on the mention in the *provvisione* of May 1345. What it tells us is that the real estates are to be described using a typical notarial form used to describe the developed space, which specified the details of the realty owners and of the proprietors of the adjacent properties (*per loca, nomina, vocabula et confines*).<sup>31</sup> Characteristic as it was for notarial and official written matters, the form would not specify the physical space (in terms of dimensions, area, or landscape features) but instead determined the estate's belonging to the city and the parish, often using customary denominations of the site concerned (*loco dicto* ...). Fundamental to the form in question were the details pointing to the proprietor and the limits of the piece of realty (*confines*) defined by pointing to the identities of the owners of the adjacent lands and plots of land, rather than with use microtopographic points.<sup>32</sup>

In parallel to the survey and execution of estates, the city's authorities started to sell communal properties they deemed irrelevant. This initiative called for their definition, in the first place. Such actions were carried out in Florence earlier on as well, they were always related to the need to raise funding for public construction works or buy out a construction-site area.<sup>33</sup> They ensured single inflows of cash and were implemented in place of special taxes announced in order to support certain particularly expensive projects.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, I assume that the sale of estates had never before assumed such a large scale, nor had it been cyclic: in contrast to that, the actions 1345–7 were cyclic indeed and aimed at regularly supporting the treasury of Florence. In March 1345, the communal authorities appointed special officers responsible for identifying useless real properties and eventually

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by the flood, it is mostly illegible; its first section, covering the fourteenth century, has been particularly affected.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Cammarosano, *Italia medievale*, 75–6.

<sup>32</sup> For a broad panorama of sources dating to the second half of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, where the form and its variants were used, see the discussion in Francesconi, Salvestrini, 'La scrittura del confine'.

<sup>33</sup> These sources mainly concern the construction of the city's ramparts: ASF, Capitoli 30, 182r–183v; PR 22, 43v–44v (11 Dec. 1325); PR 23 11r (23 Sept. 1326); PR 26, 48r (27 Aug. 1333); 76v (7 Jan. 1333). For the broader context of the fiscal politics see Maria Ginatempo, *Prima del debito: finanziamento della spesa pubblica e gestione del deficit nelle grandi città toscane, 1200–1350 ca.* (Firenze, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> One case in point being the special tax for the construction of ramparts, announced in 1325: PR 22, 39v (15 Nov. 1325).

transferring them at the best price possible.<sup>35</sup> These functionaries were repeatedly elected during the subsequent two years, every six months, and their number grew to eight, from the initial four.<sup>36</sup>

In the *provisioni* appointing the officials, the *inutilitas* of the realties on sale was confronted with the *utilitas* of the works recently undertaken to reconstruct and repair the Florentine bridges (possibly, in the aftermath of the great flood of 1333). The owners of the realties adjacent to the plots of land earmarked for sale were obligated to buy out patches of land, mostly very small and not useful anymore to the commune. The money thereby collected was allocated to the completion of public projects that had been suffering from underfunding ever since the financial crash. Two codices presenting the activities of these functionaries have survived; as we can learn, they focused on selling small plots situated *intra muros*.<sup>37</sup> Importantly, the project was executed not only by functionaries responsible for sale of the plot, assisted by their notary, but also the surveyors and construction masters who were tasked with measuring in detail the plots on sale.<sup>38</sup> The measurements done by them were fundamental to the procedure of alienation of communal estates, as evidenced by the surviving documentation. It was the outcome of the *mensuratio* that the valuation of the real properties

<sup>35</sup> The exact date of the first election is unknown, owing to an interval between the *provisioni* taken down in the registers between July 1344 and April 1345 (PR 34). It is certain, though, that the office was established in March 1345; the election of the officials is mentioned in the later ordinance issued during their term-of-office; PR 34, 47v (13 May 1345). The later sources specifying the magistracy's competencies refer to the March 1345 *provisione* and the tasks entrusted to the offices then elected (*Luca Fei et socii eius*), which implies that the election was a precedent.

<sup>36</sup> As for the sources confirming the election of the officials in the subsequent two years for six-month terms, see (in the sequence as suggested): ASF, Capitani di Parte Guelfa, Numeri Rossi 104 (Sept. 1345–March 1346); PR 34, 20r–v (27 March 1346); PR 34, 91r (17 Oct. 1346); PR 34 140v–141r (15 June 1347); Capitani di Parte Guelfa, numeri rossi 104 bis (July–Dec. 1347). Barbadoro believed that these officers were identical to the *ufficiali della torre*, giving however no source-based evidence to support this view; cf. *idem*, *Le finanze*, 240–6, 280–1.

<sup>37</sup> ASF, Capitani di Parte Guelfa, numeri rossi 104, 104 bis; transactions of lands within the city's walls prevail, though. The codex moreover mentions an alienation of the commune's rights of a different type – „cf., e.g., *liberatio hominum et personarum Comunis de Bucino*; see ASF, Capitani di Parte Guelfa, numeri rossi 104, 3v–7r; cf. Barbadoro, *Le finanze*, 244–6.

<sup>38</sup> ASF, Capitani di Parte Guelfa, numeri rossi 104 bis also contains reports on the measurements done; see 75r ff. The codex's opening pages are illegible.

(*extimatio*) depended, which was subsequently submitted to private entities obligated to buy them out. The measurement criterion was of twofold importance: being the basis for the appraisal, it ensured its objectivity and prevented accusations of unfair, inflated estimation.

The criterion of measure applied in the sale of communal properties and, consequently, in the altered status of patches of urban sale, turned from public into private, was obviously reflected in the ways these properties were described. The notarial form used for defining them additionally specified the dimensions of plots (length, width, surface area). As the *mensurationes*-based details were entered in the transfer documents, much more detailed data would oftentimes permeate into the description – as was, not infrequently, the case with points in the physical space which localised and limited the area under measurement (houses, workshops, streets, fragments of walls, canals, particular landscape features, and so on). The notarial descriptive cartography founded on the property title data was moreover enriched by data collected in the course of site visits, including detailed measurement of even quite petty strips of the municipal land. Adoption of a perspective based on official surveyors' measurements of mutually adjacent plots was subsequently reflected in the sequence of documents entered in the codices evidencing the officials' efforts. The sale of plots situated within the same place was done in a sequence, and so it is documented in the codices.<sup>39</sup> In consequence, the contents were organised according to the spatial arrangement and location of the estates. Thus, the documentation of the privatisation of redundant communal properties makes apparent a combination of two levels of perception of space, which may tentatively be referred to as 'notarial' and 'surveyor's'.<sup>40</sup> The former only uses the owner's identity in localising the site, whilst the latter makes use of features of physical space and geometry in order to define the area and its size – with aspects of micro-topography and micro-toponymy repeatedly reappearing in the descriptions.

The aforementioned undertakings concerning communal property – namely, surveying and execution of the communal estates, defining redundant properties and transferring them to private entities – should

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<sup>39</sup> ASF, Capitani di Parte Guelfa, numeri rossi 104, 104 bis.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Luciano Lagazzi, *Segni sulla terra: determinazione dei confini e percezione dello spazio nell'alto Medioevo* (Bologna, 1991).

be seen as an important background for the shaping of an idea of general recording of real estate based upon identification of the proprietor. However, two phenomena need being added to complete the picture.

One of them was consolidation of the public debt – the emergence of the *Monte del Comune*, broadly investigated in the literature.<sup>41</sup> The decision to consolidate the debt, made in 1343, activated new inventorying actions aimed at collecting all the information on the commune's creditors. A consequence of these actions was the compilation in 1347 of four enormous codices in which citizens were entered, in alphabetic order, by the city's district they belonged to, with the amount of debt owed to them specified.<sup>42</sup> The need to prepare such a big debt recording project, in order to reinforce the trust for the commune which was breached owing to the financial crisis, might have influenced the decision to launch the project under analysis. Most certainly, it proves that in the face of a crisis the authorities resolved to resort to inventorying as a tool with which to reform the administration (in the given domain) and reinforce the *fides communis*.

The crisis of trust – not in reference to the Commune, though – was associated with one more occurrence: the bankruptcy of the Peruzzi, Bardi, and other (minor) Florentine companies, which from 1343 on posed one of the Commune's most serious problems.<sup>43</sup> As a result, Florence's society faced an unprecedented crisis: financial, and – again – a trust crisis.<sup>44</sup> Florence's tribunals saw an avalanche of cases brought by creditors against debtors, whereas communal offices were obliged to carry out bankruptcy-related procedures. The findings concerning

<sup>41</sup> See, above all, Barbadoro, *Le finanze*, 629–87; Marvin B. Becker, 'The Monte from its Founding (1343–45) until the Late Fourteenth Century', in *idem*, *Florence in Transition*, 151–200; Roberto Barducci, 'Politica e speculazione finanziaria a Firenze dopo la crisi del primo Trecento (1343–1358)', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, cxxxvii (1979), 177–219; Tanzini, 1345. *La bancarotta di Firenze*, 79–98.

<sup>42</sup> ASE, *Monte comune o delle graticole*, parte II, 3946, 3947, 3948, 3949; after Tanzini, 1345. *La bancarotta di Firenze*, 81–3, 88–159; for a study of this source relative to the district of Santo Spirito, see Anthony Molho, 'Créanciers de Florence en 1347: un aperçu statistique du quartier de santo Spirito', in *idem*, *Firenze nel Quattrocento*, i: *Politica e fiscalità* (Roma 2006), 97–111.

<sup>43</sup> For the chronology of the bankruptcies, see Tanzini, 1345. *La bancarotta di Firenze*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> The importance of the trust crisis among the consequences of the bankruptcies has recently been emphasised by Tanzini; *ibidem*, 21–2, 61 ff.

the landed estate holdings were crucial to these actions, similarly as attempts to (often, fictionally) sell a piece of realty or conceal landed estate assets.<sup>45</sup> Thus, there is much to suggest that the conflicts, court cases and problems of creditors referred to in the petition to the authorities (quoted in the *provvisione* of 14 May 1346) actually corresponded with the consequences of the bankruptcies taking place. It is moreover worth emphasising that the actions related to, inter alia, determining the assets held by the Bardi family were concurrent to the project of establishing the registers, in April 1346.<sup>46</sup> While not finally resolving this question, the hypothesis can be risked that the commune's actions aimed at disclosing all the real properties owned by debtors, and a great rotation of proprietors, associated with selling at low prices the estates belonging to the bankrupt bankers, might have influenced the decision to record all the estates within the city and in the lands subject to the commune. It is possible that compilation of records of estates within Florentine dominion was meant to restore trust between the two feuding parties and, consequently, rescue the severely affected economy.

### III

#### THE 1350S: TAVOLA DELLE POSSESSIONI

The work on the project initiated in 1346 was quit probably the spring of 1348. The last piece of information regarding the above-described officials is dated 1347 and concerns their election for a six-month term.<sup>47</sup> As it therefore seems, it was the Black Death epidemic that cut short of the intended registration of estates. Before this happened, however, the functionaries announced *ordinamenta*, never implemented

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<sup>45</sup> John Najemy, *History of Florence*, 141 ff.; also, see the references in note 26.

<sup>46</sup> See PR 34, 34v–36v; cf. Saponi, *La crisi*, 175–81; Becker, 'Florentine Popular Government', 365–6; Najemy, *History of Florence*, 143–4.

<sup>47</sup> PR 35, 22v (12 Oct. 1347). The citizens elected functionaries in May 1346 were re-elected at that point. According to the available sources, ever since the beginning the work was overseen by one team whose members were consistently reelected for the consecutive terms by the *Signoria* of Florence. As a side margin, the provision features the phrase 'Tabula possessionum', in a different hand, put down later – the first (that I am aware of) use in Florence of the term in respect of registers.

and remaining unknown today.<sup>48</sup> The available documentation contains no identifiable trace of the project's successful outcome.

The idea to make up registers was recalled in July 1355, possibly on a wave of review of the communal legislation, commenced a few years earlier and completed by the summer of 1355.<sup>49</sup> Research of legal codices brought back the awareness of the project initiated a few years earlier, which in the face of the problems of the first half of the 1350s' decade could turn out to be even more useful than before – and this for several reasons. Resulting from the demographic crisis caused by the plague,<sup>50</sup> a huge part of the communal properties heretofore leased lost their leaseholders, which implied the need to identify the 'deserted' real properties and establish new leaseholds.<sup>51</sup> An unprecedented rotation of owners occurred in the real property market, which manifested itself in, among other things, a vast accumulation of ownership among those who survived the epidemic and alienation of property rights to the Church.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, in the 1350s, the communal authorities were still preoccupied with the problems, not solved before 1348, related to bankruptcies and creditors pursuing their rights.<sup>53</sup> Now, they became concurrent with the findings regarding the inheritance

<sup>48</sup> PR 42, 93v (30 July 1355).

<sup>49</sup> The need to carry out a review was decided already in 1351, PR 38, 196r–7r (12 March 1351); see Andrea Zorzi, 'Le fonti normative a Firenze nel tardo Medioevo. Un bilancio delle edizioni e degli studi', in *Statuti della Repubblica fiorentina editi a cura di Romolo Caggese – Nuova edizione*, ed. by Giuliano Pinto, Francesco Salvestrini and Andrea Zorzi, Firenze, 1999, i, LIII–CI; on the review of the communal statutes, see Giuseppe Biscione, *Il fondo "Statuti del Comune di Firenze" nell'Archivio di Stato: tradizione archivistica e ordinamenti. Saggio archivistico e inventario* (Roma, 2009), 31–53.

<sup>50</sup> See, primarily, Aliberto B. Falsini, 'Firenze dopo il 1348: le conseguenze della Pesta Nera', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, cxxx (1971), 425–503.

<sup>51</sup> See the provisions concerning *ufficiali della torre*, in the registers PR 36 and PR 37.

<sup>52</sup> These phenomena are best illustrated by the memories of Donato Velluti: having survived the plague, he fought, with success, to retrieve the estates alienated by his relatives to the Church; Donato Velluti, *Cronica domestica di messer Donato Velluti scritta fra il 1367 e il 1370*, Isidoro Del Lungo, Guglielmo Volpi (Firenze, 1914), 190–2.

<sup>53</sup> On bankruptcy procedures dragging on in the 1350s, see Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society*, 9–10, 15–17; on the financial condition and monetary policy of Florence in the second half of the century, see Marvin B. Becker, 'Problemi della finanza pubblica fiorentina della seconda metà del Trecento e dei primi del Quattrocento', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, cxxii (1965), 433–66; Barducci, 'Politica e speculazione', 177–219.



of debts incurred by the plague's victims. Reinforced control of the property market, equipped with a new instrument – the registers of properties and their owners, could be helpful in taming the prevalent chaos. The move became part of a series of actions aimed at regulating the new post-plague realities.

In drawing the background behind the registration of real properties in the 1350s, the new tax regulations should draw one's attention. Due to the deficit in the communal treasury, collection of direct tax based on the city dwellers' assets was decided in 1352, for the first time in dozens of years. The character of this levy has been the object of dispute among scholars, with the view prevailing that in 1352 and 1355 the *estimo* was, in reality, a coerced loan granted to the commune (*prestanza*).<sup>54</sup> In terms of the present subject, this discussion is not of primary relevance – as opposed to the way in which the fiscal data collected and processed at the time were recorded.

The registers recorded the taxpayers and tax amounts calculated based on the estimated property value; no movable or immovable goods were described.<sup>55</sup> These data were arranged by administrative division into four districts and sixteen gonfalons.<sup>56</sup> For internal organisation

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<sup>54</sup> See Giovanni F. Pagnini, *Della decima e di varie altre gravezze dal Comune di Firenze* (Lisbona and Lucca, 1765); Barbadoro, 'Finanza e demografia nei ruoli fiorentini d'imposta del 1352–1355', in *Atti del congresso internazionale per gli studi sulla popolazione*, ed. by Corrado Gini, ix: Sezione di Economia (Roma, 1933), 615–45; Fiumi, 'La demografia fiorentina nelle pagine di Giovanni Villani', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, cviii (1950), 106ff.; Brucker, *Florentine Politics*, 93, fn. 150. The 1352 *estimo* is discussed and analysed in detail in Alessandro Stella, 'Fiscalità, topografia e società a Firenze nella seconda metà del trecento', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, cli (1993), 797–862.

<sup>55</sup> For the differences between the *estimo* of 1352 and the *catasto* of 1427, see, above all: Elio Conti, *I catasti agrari della repubblica fiorentina e il catasto particolare toscano (secoli XIV–XIX)* (Roma, 1966); David Herlihy, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Le Toscans et leurs familles. Une étude du Catasto florentin de 1427* (Paris, 1978; Eng. translation: *Tuscans and Their Families. A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* [New Heaven, 1985]).

<sup>56</sup> Each district was subdivided into four administrative-and-military units called gonfalons (banners), which should be identified with the *compagnie del popolo*; *magnati* were not their members. For more on the importance of gonfalon as the municipal administrative unit, neighbourhood community and, later on, patronage enclave, see Andrea Zorzi, 'Contrôle social, ordre public et répression judiciaire à Florence à l'époque communale: éléments et problèmes', *Annales. Economies, sociétés, civilisations*, v (1990), 1169–88; Dale V. Kent and Francis William Kent, *Neighbours*

of these pieces of information, the smallest territorial units were used: for the city's central area, the traditional division into parishes (It. *popoli*) was preserved, whereas for the peripheries, neighbourhood communities (It. *contrade*) were used instead, determined by the names of streets around which the households focused.<sup>57</sup> Worthy of note is the fact that the subsequent collection was decided in 1355<sup>58</sup>; this date also marked the compilation of registers of all the real properties situated in the areas under the Florentine rule. This temporal coincidence should be kept in mind, however, similarly as in 1346, there might have been several reasons behind the decision to inventory the estates.

On 30 July 1355, the *Signoria*, referring to the *provvisione* of April 1346, resolved that new officials be appointed, along with notaries and scribes deemed indispensable for efficient registration of estates. In parallel, the previously announced *ordinamenta* were cancelled, whilst the new functionaries were obligated to prepare adjusted guidelines.<sup>59</sup> A few days later, once the law was approved, the actual functionaries were elected, the notaries and *nuntii* (messengers) vested to them were appointed in late August.<sup>60</sup> As soon as in September, these officers

*and Neighbourhood in Renaissance Florence: The district of the Red Lion in the Fifteenth Century* (New York, 1982).

<sup>57</sup> The *provvisione* which laid down the tax collection principles resolved that a *pro gonfalone, popolo seu contrata* division be respected. A *contrada*, otherwise termed *vicinia* or *convicinia* is a neighbourhood community delineated in the register by the street, section of a street, square, alley or lane. The Codex ASF, Estimo 306, evidencing the tax collection in 1352, is the major source for socio-topographic research of Florence in the period concerned. Barbadoro (*Finanza e demografia*) identified the differences appearing in the division by parish and street, conditional upon the part of the city; these facts were studied in detail and used in a reconstruction of the map of Florence in mid-fourteenth c. by Stella (*Fiscalità, topografia*). Analysis of this documentation has provided an important foundation for arguments regarding the loss of the importance of parishes and the decay of community bonds after the Black Death disaster. For the changing role of parishes in the fourteenth century, see Halina Manikowska, "Accor'uomo". Il 'popolo' nell'amministrazione della giustizia a Firenze durante il XIV secolo', *Ricerche Storiche*, xviii (1988), 523–48.

<sup>58</sup> See ASF, Estimo 307; the collection of tax in 1355 is referred to in Matteo Villani, *Cronica fiorentina*, iv, 83.

<sup>59</sup> PR 42, 93v (30 July 1355); Guidubaldo Guidi erroneously has 'April' and gives no reference details re. the decree; see *idem*, *Il governo della città-repubblica*, ii, 292–3.

<sup>60</sup> The appointment is mentioned in PR 42, 123r (11 Sept. 1355): "... electi fuerunt Pierus Dati Canigiani et Tomasus Monis Guidetti et alii sex cives populares ... de vi mensis augusti"; cf. Canestrini, *La scienza*, 76, fn. 2.

requested the *Signoria* to dismiss the notaries: complaints were raised about their dilatoriness and incompetence (*negligentia, insufficientia, infirmitas*). They expected that new officials be appointed instead, and that they should be granted fees from the communal treasury – with the proviso that, due to the tasks they were supposed to perform, they would accept money exclusively from the Commune of Florence.<sup>61</sup>

The 1355 regulations regarding officials responsible for the registration brought about an important change – the office was namely renamed as the *officio tabule*. The name was originally used colloquially in the vernacular, as an abridged name replacing the full Latin name; its Latin equivalent started to be used later on.<sup>62</sup> The laws dating back to the 1340s described the functionaries in terms of the respective tasks entrusted to them: “*providere et ordinare et modum invenire qualiter domus, possessiones et bona immobilia posita in civitate, comitatu et districtu Florentie scribantur et scribi possint et debeant in registro ...*”. The full name of the office – “*officium tabule civitatis et comitatus Florentie*” – was set up in the mid-1350s,<sup>63</sup> based on the term denoting the registers of properties (Lat. *tabula*; It. *tavola*). The presence and use of the term *tabula* is no surprising to scholars doing research on cadastral sources: a few dozens of years earlier, the term was used to name a list of real properties within the area of Siena;<sup>64</sup> possibly, it reappeared in Florence owing to the Siennese experience. The term calls for some attention indeed.

The notion of *tabula* preserved its basic Roman meaning into the Middle Ages, denoting a document listing rights and privileges or a register, being a list or catalogue of things belonging to a set, an inventory or, at times, a book of accounts.<sup>65</sup> A *tabula* could obviously mean a graphical representation as well; the name was adopted also for cartographic representations. Hence, *tabula* might have referred to

<sup>61</sup> PR 42, 124r (11 Sept. 1355).

<sup>62</sup> “... officio quod vulgariter appellatur officium tabule civitatis et comitatus Florentie”. A similar mechanism was at work when naming the ‘tower-related officials’ (*ufficiali della torre*).

<sup>63</sup> In July 1355 (PR 42, 93v) the name only appeared in a side note defining the subject of the *provisione*, in the same hand, reading “*balia eligendi officiales pro tabula possessionum fienda*”; in the subsequent *provisioni* it appears in the core text.

<sup>64</sup> For the literature on Siena’s *tavola delle possessioni*, see above, fn. 19.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Brian Campbell, ‘Shaping the Rural Environment: Surveyors in Ancient Rome’, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, lxxvi (1996), 88–90.

either the graphical or descriptive method of presenting a space. Its use triggered the reference to either of the two completely different set of instruments related to the key objective of (attempted) integral and organised representation of a certain space, a selected territory. There is no doubt, however, that in the case under discussion inventory of estates, the basic and major form of descriptive cartography, was the case.<sup>66</sup>

As regards the description *tabula* used to denote the registers of estates, it is worth to pay attention to a coincidence of terms related to the practice named *tabulatio*, which is well visible in sources from southern Tuscany and Umbria. *Tabulatio* was part of the procedure aiming at defining the limits of a given real property and estimation of its value; it implied that the property's area was to be given in a post-Roman area unit (*tabula*, *tavola*), with the surveyors being in charge of the measurement. Apart from the *tabulatio*, the procedure included, in most cases, a *confinatio/terminatio* (determination of the boundaries), *mensuratio* (measurement), *apilastratio* (fixing the boundary posts), *extimatio/appretiatio* (evaluation of the estate, not necessarily performed by the surveyors).<sup>67</sup> In central Italy, the surveyor responsible for measuring the boundaries is often named the *appassator* (*appassare* meaning 'to measure by steps'). The name *tabulator* was formed analogously (based on the phrase *tabulare terram*) and denoted experts learned in the art of measurement and responsible for measuring real

<sup>66</sup> See also the definitions from the Roman times: *tabulae aeris* – bronze records associated with the bronze map (forma), containing details of land allocations in a settlement; *Tabularium* – a public record office in which all records including those relating to land allocations were kept, the *tabularium* was also the imperial record offices in Rome, Campbell, *The writings of the Roman land surveyors. Introduction, text, translation and commentary* (London, 2000); Lauretta Maganzani, 'Land surveying for legal disputes: technical advice in Roman law', in F. Reduzzi Merola (ed.), *Sfruttamento tutela e valorizzazione del territorio. Dal diritto romano alla regolamentazione europea e internazionale* (Napoli, 2007), 6–8.

<sup>67</sup> Also, see *Gli statuti di Perugia dell'anno MCCCXLII*, ed. by Giustiniano degli Azzi, *Corpus Statutorum Italicorum*, l. IV, r. 141 (Roma, 1916), 413: "Le divisione terminatione, deffinitione, tavolatione, mensuratione e pilastratione fatte et ordentare". On *apilastrationes*, see Massimo Vallerani, "Il liber terminationum del comune di Perugia", *Mélanges de l'Ecole de Rome. Moyen-Âge, Temps Modernes*, xcix, 2 (1987), 649–99; moreover, see Roberto Farinelli and Andrea Giorgi, 'La 'Tavola delle possessioni' come fonte per lo studio del territorio: l'esempio di Castelnuovo dell'Abate', in Alfio Cortonesi (ed.), *La Val d'Oria nel medioevo e nei primi secoli dell'età moderna* (Roma, 1990), 213–25.

estates at site visits.<sup>68</sup> However, the term would equally well fit notaries who were responsible for registering estates *in tabula*.<sup>69</sup> Let us remind that as a unit of measure of different sizes, the *tabula* was used in many cities of northern Italy, but not in Florence. As we will see, *tabulatio* was not used in registration procedures determined by Florentine officials. This did not translate into dissemination of the term *tavola* as the name of the register of all real estates within the dominion of Florence.

Contrary to the laws from the 1340s, the *provvisione* dating to the middle of the 1350s and related to Florentine *officio della tavola* contains no indication on the purposes of its adoption – apart from a general statement that compilation of such registers has proved to be ‘greatly of assistance’ and therefore has been reinstated. The chronicle by Matteo Villani, being the most important source describing the history of Florence in the first decade after the Black Death, gives some indication. Villani’s commentary on the records of realties was written a few years after the project’s reactivation<sup>70</sup> and appealed to the posterity: aware of how failure-prone it was, the author warned against it. He complained about considerable financial outlays allocated to the initiative and remarked that the city’s experienced citizens considered the project unrealistic. Albeit it is the only

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<sup>68</sup> The Sienese *tavola delle possessioni* is the major example of their activities within general inventorying of estates; see above, fn. 19.

<sup>69</sup> See Sorbi, *Aspetti della struttura*. Franek Sznura notices that some of the notaries could perform the surveyor’s job which they had learnt thanks to their frequent cooperation with land surveyors in alienations of real properties or entering them in the records; see *idem*, ‘Le città toscane nel XIV secolo. Aspetti edilizi e urbanistici’, in Sergio Gensini (ed.), *La Toscana nel secolo XIV caratteri di una civiltà regionale* (Pisa, 1988), 390–1; for the notaries’ competencies as surveyors in the earlier centuries in the area of Tuscany and the form they used in describing the properties, see Anne Mailloux, ‘Perception de l’espace chez les notaires de Lucques (VIIIe–IXe siècle)’, *Mélanges de l’Ecole de Rome. Moyen-Âge*, cix, 1 (1997), 21–57.

<sup>70</sup> Matteo Villani, *Cronica fiorentina*, v, 74: ‘Come in Firenze s’ordinò la tavola delle possessioni’. Domenico Buoninsegni, a fifteenth-century author who made a generous use of Villani’s chronicle, used the significant term *catasto*, associated with a fiscal project, to denote the register: ‘... una tavola ovvero catasto, ovvero libro, dove fossero ascritte tutte le possessioni e i beni immobili della città’ e del contato e di chi fessono”; Domenico Buoninsegni, *Storie della città di Firenze*, iii, 479; on the use of the Villani chronicle by Buoninsegni, see Anthony Molho, ‘Domenico di Leonardo Buoninsegni’s *Istoria Fiorentina*’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, xxiii (1970), 3, 256–6, here 259.

contemporary annalistic source that refers to the occurrences in question, Villani's description can be regarded as reflecting the *opinio communis* on the matter.

Before 1355, Villani noted down that on request of "certain citizens", the Florentine authorities adopted, in August, a resolution to draw up a "register of all the real properties in the city and its *contado*".<sup>71</sup> In light of his description, the *tavola* was initiated by local creditors, the only reason for having such registers in place was to facilitate for them the determination of their debtors' actual possessions. It is not impossible, though, that Villani's remark combined two provisions, one from 1346 and the other, from 1355, using the 1340s laws in describing the realities of the subsequent decade, as the incentive behind the initiative was identical in both cases. This would support our hypothesis whereby the very basic reason behind Florence's earliest cadastral project was not a new fiscal action (at least, in official terms) as was suggested by Becker but rather an attempt at regulating and taking control of the indebtedness market.

The petition, Villani continues, proposed also the rules according to which the contents of the *tavola* would be rearranged (like in the *provvisione* from 1346): lists for the city and for the remaining lands were to be prepared, both to be organised according to the four districts of Florence.<sup>72</sup> The chronicler gives more detail than the provision itself would tell us, since the later actions of the officials and the *ordinamenta* they published were known to him. Owners were obligated to report on their properties, under pain of severe penalty. Interestingly, Villani observes that many of them submitted their declarations merely to show that they owned any real property at all, which posed a difficulty to the registration process as the same estates have been reported several times.<sup>73</sup> Heads of parish communities and

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<sup>71</sup> It was in August that the *provisio* of 30 July was finally approved and the officials elected (6 Aug.); Matteo Villani, *Cronica fiorentina*, v, 74.

<sup>72</sup> "... una tavola, nella quale si scrivessono tutti i beni immobili della città e del contado per popolo e per confini, e diedono il modo a catuno quartiere della città e del contado per sè"; *ibidem*. Villani would not mention the *distretto*, which otherwise appears in the *provvisioni* regarding the project. Moreover, in respect of the provision of the 1340s, no remark is made on the (re)arrangement of the register of areas outside the city, in line with the rural parishes.

<sup>73</sup> "... e ancora, che recavano una medesima cosa per mostrare che possedessero i beni"; *ibidem*.

other *universitates* (*reggitori*) were likewise supposed to submit their reports on estates (*recate*).<sup>74</sup>

The descriptions were expected to specify the parish (*popoli*) and the boundaries or confines (*confini*) within which the properties were situated. Thus, Villani quotes the basic elements of the notarial pattern of space description as already known to us: in characterising the realty and defining its location, it used ownership as the fundamental category. A thing of particular importance is the fact that the chronicler strongly emphasises how impractical the pattern was, remarking that in case when the piece of estate already noted down changed the owner, the description lost its validity completely: the data was no longer relevant, which consequently affected the adequacy of the other descriptions. Thereby, Villani points to one of the major causes of the project's failure – insufficient tools used in descriptive cartography, characteristic of notarial description of space, could not keep up with the latest developments in the real estate market. These shortcomings must have grown even more evident in the face of the phenomena taking place in Florence in mid-fourteenth century: vindication proceedings, demographic changes caused by the Black Death, unprecedented alienations of estates. To Matteo Villani's mind, the primary reason for the project's failure was intense trading in real properties (*mutazione de' beni immobili*) seen in Florence at the time. His description suggests that it resulted from a larger-than-elsewhere economic activity.<sup>75</sup>

Matteo Villani's words on the hardships and financial outlays related to the project are reflected in the (residually preserved) historic records concerning the activities of the officials or clerks.<sup>76</sup> Attempts

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<sup>74</sup> For their responsibilities in the registration process, see ASF, Monte comune o delle Graticole, p. II, 1358. In light of this documentation, the key competencies of the *reggitori*, *sindicati* and *rettori* was to dispel any ambiguities regarding to estates within the confines of their respective communities.

<sup>75</sup> "... ma quello ch' é piú forte, si é la mutazione de' beni, che piú occorre nella nostra città che altrove perché piú abbonda di mercatanzie e di mestieri e d'arti, che hanno a fare la mutazione de' beni immobili"; *ibidem*.

<sup>76</sup> See Canestrini, *La scienza*, 79 (I have not managed to review on my own all the historic records mentioned by this author as of the year 1862; some of the sources related to the project in the 1340s and 1350s and referred to herein are not mentioned in Canestrini's study) for records concerning the *tavola delle possessioni*, see also Guidi, *Il governo*, ii, 293. For more on the difficulties obstructing these undertakings and incessant delays, see PR 45, 227r–228r (21 June 1358).

at putting the Florentine *tavola delle possessioni* into practice lasted until 1359, the year the initiative was probably abandoned.<sup>77</sup> As is the case with the forties' decade, no sources are extant, be it indirect that would enable a more detailed study of the estate description form used. The regulations of the highest authorities and the functionaries' decisions regarding the rules of registering the properties remain the main source of our knowledge on the *officium tabule's* activities.

The Florentine *Signoria* resumed the *ufficio della tavola's* matters four months after establishing the body.<sup>78</sup> Albeit the officers were equipped with all the rights enabling them to prepare the principles of registration and enforce them, the decision was made in December 1355 to reinforce the message and explain the disputable matters. The character of the provisions then adopted suggests how immense was the resistance with which the project officers struggled. The *Signoria* issued several regulations aiming at stirring the estate owners into submitting property statements (It. *recate*), explaining the status of these declarations and their importance in inquiring into the rights to the properties. Above all, however, it was decided that communal officials will not defend the owners' rights in matters regarding sequestrating or destroying the properties not reported earlier on by their owners and listed in the so-called *libri della tavola*. The problem of *devastationes* and *occupationes* was pressing for suburban possessions – the *Signoria* addressed it twice at its meetings in 1355.<sup>79</sup> The initiative to determine and regulate the titles to the estates via

<sup>77</sup> See ASF, Monte comune o delle Graticole, p. II, 1358 (numbered as per a manuscript inventory of the fond, prepared by Anthony Molho), containing a documentation of the activities of the functionaries elected for twelve months in the summer of 1358 and 1359; the presence of such officers in 1359 is also attested by ASF, Podestà, deputationes, 1266 (1359). Canestrini quotes 1358 as the last year of their activity, as the *Signoria's* last *provvisione* related to the tasks entrusted to them is so dated; see PR 45, 227r–v (21 June 1358); and. *idem*, *La scienza*, 72. ASF, Monte comune o delle Graticole, II, 1358 confirms that one more commission of functionaries was elected. The sources available confirm that the *ufficiali della tavola* convened, throughout the period of their functioning, at the house owned by the Sacchetti family at the then-Garbo St. (today, via della Condotta); see [http://www.palazzospinelli.org/architetture/scheda.asp?denominazione=garbo&ubicazione=&button=&proprietà=&architetti\\_ingegneri=&pittori\\_scultori=&note\\_storiche=&uomini\\_illustri=&ID=2240](http://www.palazzospinelli.org/architetture/scheda.asp?denominazione=garbo&ubicazione=&button=&proprietà=&architetti_ingegneri=&pittori_scultori=&note_storiche=&uomini_illustri=&ID=2240) [Accessed: 15 March 2019].

<sup>78</sup> PR 42, 161r (9 Dec. 1355).

<sup>79</sup> Those sentenced to banishment (*exbannitores et rebelles*) reportedly committed illegal use of land, PR 42, 114v–15v (21 Aug. 1355); PR 42, 161r–v (9 Dec. 1355).



compilation of a *tavola delle possessioni* should probably be partly associated with this issue.

The *Signoria* moreover attempted at sorting out the proprietors' concerns of possible tax encumbrances. It was resolved that nobody who had his estate registered under his own name would be obligated to pay the tax on acquisition of new real property.<sup>80</sup> It was also explained that no fiscal encumbrances would be imposed on the owners, save for those theretofore in force.<sup>81</sup> Based on these decisions, one may infer how the society perceived the new government and the tasks it was entrusted with: the people did not believe that, in a future, the registers would not become the basis for evaluation of estates and taxation of their owners.

This bunch of regulations issued in December 1355 were inserted in the text of *provvisione* in Italian – a rather unique and noteworthy fact of use of the vernacular language in official records which traditionally used Latin. The principles of registering estates were probably developed by *ufficiali della tavola* in Italian and, as such, presented at a *Signoria* meeting; in this very form, they were ready to be announced by heralds to the city's dwellers, the *contado* and the *distretto*.<sup>82</sup> This supposition is confirmed by the major (and most voluminous) source concerning the Florentine *tavola delle possessioni* – a collection of decisions compiled in 1356. In this case, we come across two sources: in the first, only the preamble and the notary's signature are in Latin, while all the rules regarding the registration of estates and compilation of the *tavola* are in Italian;<sup>83</sup> the second *filza* contains files written down entirely in the vernacular.<sup>84</sup> This obviously does not mean that

<sup>80</sup> This particular tax was called *gabella dei contratti*.

<sup>81</sup> Those specified included: the *estimo* in the *contado*, tax encumbrances imposed on magnates (*gravezze de nobili*), and indirect taxes adopted (*gabelle*).

<sup>82</sup> Also, cf. ASF, Monte comune o delle Graticole, II, 135, 3v–4r (aforementioned) – a *filza* comprising as well the *bandimenta* dated 1359 which evidence that attempts at implementing the project were made.

<sup>83</sup> ASF, Miscellanea repubblicana, busta XIX: *ordinamenta officii tabule*. The *filza*'s title page features the date 'MCCCLVI' (Guidi erroneously has '1355', cf. *idem*, *Il governo*, 292–3); it contains *ordinamenta* written down by ser Santi Bruni, the functionaries' notary, whose sign and signature is featured on 6v. The source is described by Canestrini, his study being the only one to discuss details of the *ordinamenta*; *idem*, *La scienza*, 77–9.

<sup>84</sup> ASF, Carte Stroziane, seconda serie, 96, 8, 22 (sheets without the notary's signature or dating) presents, with some little deviations, the same content as ASF

the registers that resulted from the above-described work had been compiled in Italian. The *ufficio della tavola*'s provisions preserved in the vernacular allow us to emphasize the reach of the project: the *ordinamenta* were targeted at the broadest public and were meant to be comprehensible to all the realty owners in the *dominium* of Florence. However, the appearance of vernacular here should be studied in future in a more detailed way and a far broader context.

When preparing the new rules of registration of estates in 1356, the *ufficiali della tavola*<sup>85</sup> had at their disposal the provisions made up by their predecessors – the *ordini* from the 1340s (unknown to us today) and the *ordinamenta* issued in 1355. The actions taken in 1356, aimed at upgrading and improving the system, made use of the earlier solutions, possibly to a considerable extent. Importantly, they were understood, on the whole, as a follow-up of the actions taken almost nine years earlier.<sup>86</sup> This is additionally emphasised by an annotation stating that one of the functionaries appointed in 1346 participated in the compilation of the *ordinamenta* in 1356.<sup>87</sup> The decisions prepared anew primarily focused on problems related to the system obtaining data on the real properties. As we already know, it was, in its entirety, based on statements by the estates' owners. A fundamental majority of the rules contained in the *ordinamenta* concerned imposition of the obligation to declare the properties possessed, the rules of reporting on the newly-purchased realties, formal solution of ambiguities regarding the rights to the declared estates and proceedings regarding erroneously reported estates. In order to motivate the owners to meet

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Miscellanea repubblicana, busta XIX, but with a different spelling. The above-quoted excerpts of the provisions are quoted after ASF, Miscellanea repubblicana, busta XIX (hereinafter: *Ordinamenta officii tabule*). I do not compare herein these two sources in detail.

<sup>85</sup> The identities of the eight functionaries is contained in the Latin preamble, also specifying their entrusted task; the preamble does not contain the phrase *ufficiali della tavola*, otherwise used in the vernacular. The officers included Filippus Bartoli Filippi, Jacobus Lapi Gavacciani, Pierus Lapi Baldovinecti, Bardus Corsi, Ghinus Caccini de Boncianis, Anfrione domini Geri de Spinis, Niccolaus Dini Ferrantini, and Cantinus Agnoli. Their term-of-office ended on 5 August 1356; the first recorded provisions are dated 3 June 1356; see *Ordinamenta officii tabule*, 1r. These provisions were due to be announced by communal heralds (*banditori*) in June 1356.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*, 8v; namely, messer Tommaso degli Altoviti, elected functionary in 1346, here as advisor to the officials.

their obligation to register the estates, penalties were laid down for those who delayed the submittal of the declaration, made untrue notifications, or breached any of the *ordinamenta* issued by the *ufficio della tavola*. Those who had their estate unregistered were threatened by a loss of the title (which would then be taken over by the Florentine commune's domain)<sup>88</sup> and of the right to receive harvest from the land under lease (the harvest from unregistered estates would then likewise become the commune's property).<sup>89</sup> Upon the misdemeanours described in the *ordinamenta*, the tribunals of *Podestà* and of the Executor of Justice were to adjudicate. Many of these provisions may be an important source of knowledge in studies on the property ownership law applied in late medieval Florence. Analysis of this sort is not the point herein, though. More importantly, the *ordinamenta officii tabule* indicate the way in which the declarations (*recate*) submitted were arranged and organised within the registers compiled for the purpose.

The registers of all the real properties situated within Florence (referred to in the text as *libri e registri della tavola del comune di Firenze*) were to be classed into several categories. It was namely provided that registers were dedicated to different types of property status: (i) estates belonging to the citizens of the city of Florence; (ii) estates of the Commune of Florence; (iii) estates of the inhabitants of the *contado*; (iv) estates owned by Church institutions; (v) confiscated estates (*beni dei ribelli*)<sup>90</sup>; (vi) 'foreign' estates (*beni dei forestieri*); and, lastly, (vii) estates of the Guelph Party. Each of these lists was to be arranged in terms of *intra muros* vs. *extra muros* space and subsequently in line with the city's four districts.<sup>91</sup> As opposed to these parchment registers, a separate one was to be compiled in the form of paper codex detailing those estates as to which disputes and obscurities occurred.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, 6r.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*, 7v.

<sup>90</sup> On the management of the estates confiscated by the end of the first half of the fourteenth c., see Barbadoro, *Le finanze*, 220–38.

<sup>91</sup> However, it has to be remarked that these terms (*intra/extra muros*) do not appear in the regulations referring to the division into the city and the lands in the *contado* and *distretto*; *Ordinamenta officii tabule*, 2v. About the contemporary redefinition of the *quartieri nel contado* for the fiscal scopes, see Benigni, *L'organizzazione territoriale*, 162. The *ordinamenta* do not recall the division of subject territory in *leghe*.

This reconstruction of the *tavola delle possessioni*'s structure enables us to get the idea about the number of registers to be drafted and the vastness of the (potential) problems and ambiguities implied by the classification of estates, in case the undertaking ended up in a successful outcome. Well-ordered data was the fundamental feature of these inventories, which is worth emphasising: whether a given estate would be listed was not determined by its location but by the abode, in district terms, of its proprietor.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the planned inventory was not a register of estates (as the formulas known from the *provvisioni* might suggest)<sup>93</sup> but rather, of real properties assigned to their owners or the institutions they belonged to. This is a key difference as it testifies to the use of specific tools for descriptive cartography purposes. As we have already seen, the very description of an estate was drafted based on the statements submitted and following the notarial form detailing the owner of the property and its adjacent properties.<sup>94</sup> The descriptions of realties were arranged by the owner's assignment to a given district and whether he was a citizen of the city or an *extra muros* land dweller, rather than by geographical position. Hence, this system reveals characteristics typical of tax systems for which taxpayer details is the primary information. There is no trace, though, of determination of the estate's value or any top-down, official evaluation procedure carried out along with the registration. The *ordinamenta* only make references to the value in case a penalty was imposed for failure to report on the newly purchased realty (such penalty was reckoned based on the actual value, as in the case of taxation on new property)<sup>95</sup> or when estates were reported which in fact did not belong to the person whose name was specified (then, the penalty equalled 50 per cent of the estate's value).<sup>96</sup> There is no indication, though, that estimated value of properties was part of the estates' description.

It is worth pointing out that, contrary to the system that supported the collection of *estimo* in 1352, the *tavola delle possessioni*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, 1v.

<sup>93</sup> To recall: *qualiter domus, possessione et bona immobilia posite in civitate, comitatu et districtu Florentie scribantur et scribi possint*. There is no mention of owners.

<sup>94</sup> The *ordinamenta* remark again that a blank ought to be left against each of the entries, in case of a future alienation; *ibidem*, 2r–2v.

<sup>95</sup> *Ordinamenta officii tabule*, 4r.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, 7 v.

made no reference to data arranged after the city's division into gonfalons and smaller units – parishes and streets. District (or, more specifically, 'quarter' – *quartiere*) was the only territorial unit applied to citizens of Florence and suburban residents. Contrary to the earlier *provvisioni*, the *ordinamenta* from the 1350s never mention that the registers covering *extra muros* areas would be arranged by rural parishes; however, the preserved documentation dated 1358 and 1359 implies that such an arrangement was retained.<sup>97</sup>

There is one more essential conclusion stemming from the analysis of the *tavola delle possessioni*'s structure: its purpose was, namely, to gather, within a single undertaking, the information on real properties of varied status – those belonging to private individuals as well as ecclesial institutions, the commune, and other. As we have seen, estates assigned to the specified categories had been inventoried earlier, and offices (such as *ufficiali della torre*) were responsible for such exercises. This time, the knowledge on real properties was to be arranged with use of uniform criteria, within the confined of one general project. Reporting on estates other than private was made obligatory for the *rectori* and *sindachi* of all the communities within the state – that is, communes, parishes, and other *universitates*.<sup>98</sup> The conception to carry out such a wide-scale inventoring project must have heavily contributed to its eventual failure.

One last, and not unimportant, issue requires being discussed – namely, the role of those who were to gather all the property statements and rearrange them into appropriate registers. As per the provisions adopted, the task was entrusted to eight scribes (*scrivani*), two for each of the city's districts.<sup>99</sup> However, their number seems not commensurable with their assigned function. Their tasks should not be mistaken for the role of office's notary whose primary task was to write down the officials' *ordinamenta* and deliver them to the communal archive (*Camera degli atti del Comune di Firenze*).<sup>100</sup> Upon quoting the identity of the elected scribes, the title *ser*, otherwise typical of notaries, was

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<sup>97</sup> The documentation specifies off-city *popoli*, arranged by the *quartieri*. The *sindicati* and *rettori* of these communities were expected to report to the officials or their scribes to submit clarifications regarding the status of some of the realties concerned; ASF, Monte comune o delle Graticole, p. II, 1358.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, 6v.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, 1v.

<sup>100</sup> For more on the tasks of the office's notary, see *ibidem*, 8v.

not used, which makes one suppose that they were not members of the Florentine guild of notaries.<sup>101</sup> Quite importantly, all the records meant to be made by the *scrivani* as part of their bestowed function were given the quality of notarial documents, based whereupon property rights or titles could be pursued.<sup>102</sup> Signatures of the scribes were to be featured on all the registers to be compiled. Each register was expected to be prepared in two copies – one to go to the city’s archive, to be taken care of there by the monks in charge of protection of books and registers, and the other to be kept by those scribes who had recorded estate details therein.<sup>103</sup> Hence, the scribes’ studio, arranged at the *ufficiali della tavola*’s headquarters,<sup>104</sup> became a special place in the city: a sort of ‘chancellery’ at which Florence’s citizens were supposed to turn up, in several consecutive months, to submit statements regarding their real properties, report on possible alienations, or get acquainted with the registers (the *scrivani* were obligated under the *ordinamenta* to render them available on demand).<sup>105</sup> The scribes were moreover obligated to keep so-called *memoriali del quartiere* – registers where all actions regarding the estates were entered, as from the registration start date until the project completion. It is therefore worth stressing that whereas the *ufficiali della tavola* were responsible for preparation and supervision of the registration, it was the *scrivani* who were the main executors, as those in charge of the project’s technical aspects. This is why the provisions repeatedly imposed penalties upon them for failing to observe the principles of the registration; complaints

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<sup>101</sup> The following were elected the office’s scribes in 1356: Giovanni Acorsi, Giorgio di Bartolomeo, Filippo da Stagio da Torichio, Torigiano Bonaccorsi, Bartolomeo di Ruccho Savini, Domenicho d’Albiço Fagiuoli, Strocça di ser Pino, and Dino d’Uberto Ferrantini; *ibidem*, 1v. Obviously, the rules under which they operated were to remain binding for those to replace them afterwards.

<sup>102</sup> “Anche che tucte e singule scritture fate o che si faranno per gli decti scrivani presenti o che saranno o per alcuno di loro come decto e di sopra secondo la forma de decti ordini facti o che si facessono per inançi durante il tempo dello officio dello scrivano che cosi avesse scritto e scrivesse valgano e tenghano e quelle si dea e dare si debbia piena fede si e come scrite e facte e pubblicate fossero per mano di publico notaio”; *ibidem*, 8r–v.

<sup>103</sup> Individual registers were to be kept with the scribes whose signatures were placed under the registers

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, 1r, see above, ftn. 78.

<sup>105</sup> *Ordinamenta officii tabule*, 5r; cf ASE, Monte comune o delle Graticole, p. II, 1358, 4r.

put forth by officials mostly pointed to the scribes' incompetence or delays in their work.<sup>106</sup>

#### IV CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above-described solutions, it can be concluded that the decision to produce a *tavola delle possessioni* in Florence was founded on an unprecedented need to develop an integral, complete and exhaustive picture of immovable properties situated within the dominion of Florence. The registration system compiled in the middle of the fourteenth century made use of solutions characteristic also of a tax system. The expected result was a geography of proprietors, rather than one of possessions, even the project was called for describe "qualiter domus, possessione et bona immobilia posite in civitate, comitatu et districtu Florentie". Fundamental to the method of arranging the estate data in the registers was the owner and the territorial unit he was assigned to.<sup>107</sup>

Consequently, the proprietor was the most important category in describing the place; the parish within which the estates were situated was second in importance, as did the identities of the owners of adjacent properties (*confini*), as characteristic of the notarial form used in describing the place. The spatial category that determined not the description of estates but the way the declarations were arranged in the *tavola delle possessioni* included the division into four districts within the city and the space inside and outside the city. It is worth remarking that in marking the *intra muros* space, the division into gonfalons, parishes and neighbourhood communities developed around streets has not been followed (at least in the *ordinamenta*), whilst it was used in the *estimo* of 1352.

The system used to collect information on real properties, which was meant as a basis for registering the estates, was based on the statements of the proprietors and, in some cases, community superiors.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>106</sup> For complaints about indolence and delays in the work done by scribes, see PR 45, 227r–8r (21 June 1358).

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Benigni, *L'organizzazione territoriale*; Benigni pointing out the importance of fiscal system in the organization of Florentine dominion does not mention the *tavola delle possessioni*.

<sup>108</sup> ASF, Monte comune o delle Graticole, p. II, 1358.

These solutions were elaborated based on the traditions applied in Florentine fiscal and administrative system. The *tavola delle possessioni* was doubtlessly an important stage in the development of the property declaration system and ordering the knowledge on estates, the monumental example of this evolution being the later *Catasto* of 1427.<sup>109</sup> No strict association between these two undertakings should be traced, however; specifically, the *tavola delle possessioni* ought not to be viewed from the standpoint of the great cadastral project from the early fifteenth century.<sup>110</sup> I think that it should not be compared to the other similar initiatives implemented in the other cities.<sup>111</sup>

It is possible that the Florentine register was not directly related to an attempt to impose new levies or encumbrances on the citizens and dwellers of areas controlled by the city – albeit even the contemporaries did not quite believe in such a positive scenario. No *extimatio* done in respect of the estates, as emphasised in the records, confirms this hypothesis. The intention behind the initiative was mainly to take in hand the situation in the property market and to try and resolve the problems of local creditors. The incentives should be identified among the consequences of the financial crisis of the 1340s and the changes triggered by the Black Death epidemic. The project's initiators did not use the registration for the purpose of tax-related evaluation of estates, but rather to ensure their citizens the enforcement of their vested rights and a solution of conflicts occurring among them. Resolving to carry out the project, the communal authorities fulfilled their basic and most important duties. Resulting from the initiative, the communal officials – including the tribunals mentioned multiple times in the *ordinamenta*: those of the *Podestà* and the Executor of Justice – would obtain an instrument to broaden and considerably enhancing the judicial control on the lands subordinated to the commune. The Florentine *tavola delle possessioni* can be therefore associated with attempts to improve the operation of the judiciary system, rather than with fiscal policy. As such, the *tavola* may be seen as one of the crucial building blocks in the construction of Florentine territorial state and should be studied as a part of the most important projects undertaken in the middle of

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<sup>109</sup> On the system applied at the time, see Otto Karmin, *La legge del catasto fiorentino* (Firenze, 1906); Ugo Procacci, *Studio sul Catasto Fiorentino* (Firenze, 1996).

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Canestrini, *La scienza*, and Sorbi, *Aspetti della struttura*.

<sup>111</sup> Fiumi, *L'imposta diretta*, 342–3.



the Fourteenth century.<sup>112</sup> While the documentation of the project is fragmentary, it may importantly contribute to analysing the relationships between the communal institutions and the principals of the *universitates* subordinated to Florence.<sup>113</sup>

The estate inventorying project discussed herein was an unprecedented initiative in Florence, aiming at registering estates of various statuses – private as well as communal, ecclesial, or confiscated (to name the major categories). Due to the lack of surviving detailed rules of registration developed by the officials in the 1340s, it is impossible to determine at which stage the idea appeared to include in the registers the communal, Church-owned, and confiscated estates as well as those belonging to the Guelph party and the *forestieri*. The attempt to draw up a *tavola delle possessioni* should be regarded as an important stage in the formation of the method of defining and perceiving the space controlled by Florence's dominion. It has to be borne in mind, though, that surveys or inspections of estates – communal ones, in the first place – were among the most traditional control instruments applied in Italian communes and among the key duties of the commune's major officials.<sup>114</sup> Registration of estates and determining their bounds was applied in order to define the sovereignty and control, and oftentimes to enforce punishments in respect of political enemies and convicts, or to define the borderline between private and public space (to name the main objectives). In mid-fourteenth century, the Florentine authorities resolved to make use of the well-known tool under discussion – this time, on an unprecedented scale. Its inadequacy to the intended compass led eventually to a failure. And, there is no coincidence in the fact that initiation of the project was first decided in the mid-forties, at the time when the communal authorities carried out several great inventorying or stocktaking projects in order to reform the commune, improve the management of its goods (and debts) and the superiority over the subordinated lands in the *contado* and *distretto*.

*trans. Tristan Korecki*

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<sup>112</sup> See among others Giorgio Chittolini (ed.), *La crisi degli ordinamenti comunali e le origini dello stato del Rinascimento* (Bologna, 1979).

<sup>113</sup> ASF, Monte comune o delle Graticole, p. II, 1358.

<sup>114</sup> See Massimo Vallerani, 'L'affermazione del sistema podestarile e le trasformazioni degli assetti istituzionali', in Giancarlo Andenna et al., *Comuni e signorie nell'Italia settentrionale: la Lombardia*, Storia d'Italia, vi (Torino, 1998), 385–426.

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