

I • THE ACQUISITION AND ALIENATION OF COUNTRY PROPERTY

Families sought to establish their identity in many ways: most obviously through the adoption of a family name and in the display of pictorial and representational signs such as heraldic devices, personal emblems or portraits, or alternatively through written records such as *ricordanze*, genealogies and even the preservation of family archives. Another tactic operated firstly by way of territorial association, through the occupation and ownership of land or space,¹ and secondly, with the creation of a material identity consisting of inhabited buildings, their contents and all possessions. This material identity, once established, could be passed from generation to generation and became the patrimony. The preservation of a patrimony was considered universally desirable in late medieval and Renaissance society.² Nevertheless, it would be wrong to think of its form as fixed, for it was constantly being modified, either augmented and embellished or eroded and transformed. Since the management of property is a continuing process of negotiation, this chapter considers the manoeuvres and strategies that the Strozzi family adopted in their attempt to preserve their rural patrimony during the fifteenth century.

INHERITANCE³

Belonging to a well-established, landed family, the fifteenth-century Strozzi mostly inherited their

country estates, and wherever possible they retained those ancestral lands. Of the twenty-two Strozzi villa owners listed in the first *catasto* of 1427,⁴ fourteen were able to pass their principal country estate to their sons and grandsons, who declared the same villa in the last *catasto* of 1480⁵ (Fig. 1 and Appendix B). The remaining eight examples demonstrate that the sale of country estates usually took place under duress. Two of these owners died childless, two were exiled, another family emigrated to Ferrara and another sold land to pay debts. The tenacious attitude to ancestral estates is illustrated by Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi, whose husband, Matteo di Simone, had died in exile and who reluctantly sold her land piece by piece to support her banished sons. She managed to keep the inn at Quaracchi for nearly thirty years after her husband's death, only selling in 1462; and when her son Filippo finally returned, she still owned the farm at Pozzolatico, which had belonged to her father-in-law at the turn of the century.⁶

Thus, the great majority of Strozzi landowners tried to retain their real estate even in the face of misfortune, and a moderate degree of debt was not usually enough to bring about sale. On the contrary, poverty was often cited as a reason for keeping a country house. For example, Bernardo di Giovanni at Signano, Ubertino di Tommaso at Montughi, Carlo di Marco at Il Palagio and Marco di Goro at Fornello all claimed to live in the country because they were too poor to reside in town.⁷ Only two members of

the clan seem to have sold their main country residence because of debts: Rinieri d'Antonio sold his villa at Brozzi to a richer Strozzi cousin, Francesco di Benedetto in 1441 and Lionardo di Stagio sold his villa at Casi to Francesco Sasseti in 1477.⁸

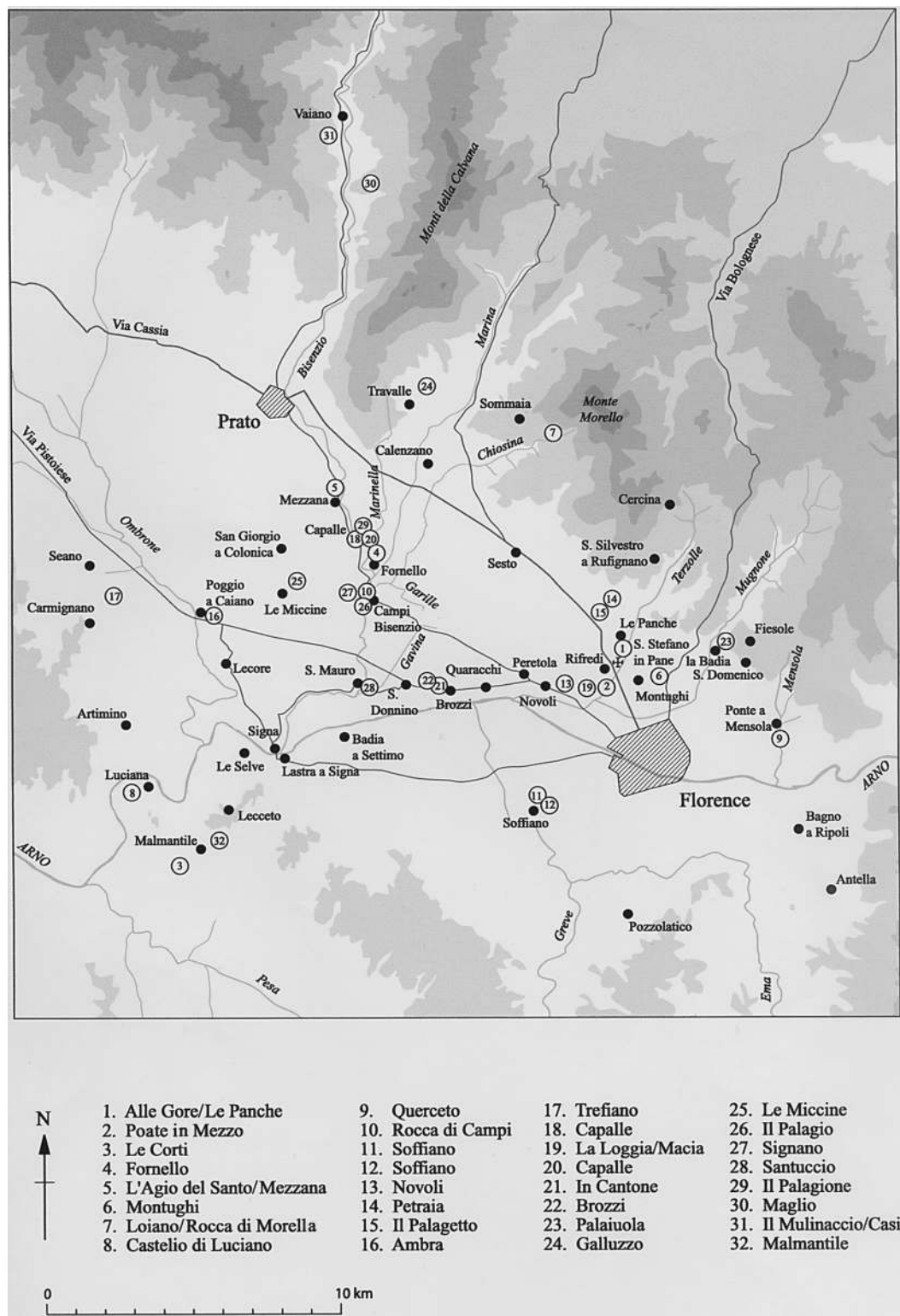
Nor did the Strozzi sell country lands in order to buy houses in town or to construct new palaces there. Later we shall see that, although Francesco Sasseti bought the site for a new town house, he did not sell country property so as to raise the capital to build in Florence. The wealthiest members of the Strozzi clan, Palla di Nofri and Filippo di Matteo, had sufficient funds to build a palace in the city while maintaining their country estates. Only Palla di Palla and his sons sold rural property in order to build their new town palace, the Strozzi, although significantly they chose to sell land and scattered farm houses while managing to keep their main country residence at Soffiano. In tax returns there are many complaints from Strozzi who could not afford a town house, yet only one of the family, Rinieri d'Antonio, took up the option to sell his villa in order to retain urban property.

It has been suggested that country property was a less highly esteemed component of the Florentine patrimony than urban real estate,⁹ but the Strozzi evidence, demonstrating that there was a firm and widely held policy of preserving inherited villas,¹⁰ shows that it is unwise to contrast attitudes to town and country property in black and white terms. The most pragmatic reason for holding on to ancestral lands is that inheritance is the only form of acquisition that requires no capital outlay. But above all, the retention of old property as well as the choice of new sites in Strozzi-dominated districts, demonstrates that the association of family identity with ancestral country estates remained powerful throughout the century. There was no rush to sell out and build new villas in new places.¹¹ Filippo di Matteo was unusual because he returned to Florence in 1470 with a great fortune in capital but no real estate and had the opportunity to begin on fresh ground as well as the means to build on a grand scale. Nevertheless, he is a paradigmatic example of the traditional clansman, investing modestly and conservatively in the old family areas, buying back the

villa at Santuccio, which had previously belonged to his uncle and where his family had owned the patronage rights to an oratory since the 1370s, acquiring a house at Capalle that his kinsman had owned and was close to other cousins, and finally purchasing land at Le Miccine where several Strozzi grazed their livestock.

The notion of ancestral lands has been challenged by P. J. Jones, who suggested that such estates were not as ancient as genealogists had implied and that they were acquired in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries rather than in the eleventh or twelfth.¹² However, the desire of fifteenth-century landowners and diarists to represent properties acquired by their fathers and grandfathers as ancestral, is itself significant, and reveals their wish to appropriate the signs of dynastic stability and old wealth in an accelerated timescale. Strozzi dominance in the districts of Campi and Capalle was indeed relatively recent. Campi Bisenzio had been a feudal estate of the Mazzinghi family from the tenth century,¹³ until the Strozzi began to buy into the area around 1295, increasing their holdings as the Mazzinghi fortunes sank during the fourteenth century.¹⁴ The Strozzi fortress at Campi was not built until the 1370s by Carlo di Stozza, who enlisted funds for construction from other members of his clan.¹⁵ Similarly, Capalle had long been a rural haunt of the archbishop of Florence, who owned a palace next to the ancient *pieve* there.¹⁶ In this case too, the Strozzi probably only gained their foothold in the *castello* in the early fourteenth century,¹⁷ but they were certainly a dominant presence by the end of the fourteenth century and retained three large estates at Capalle throughout the fifteenth century.¹⁸

Although most Strozzi inherited their estates directly from their father or grandfather, a few members of the clan benefitted from non-patrilineal or collateral inheritance. For example, Piero di Carlo's estate was entirely made up of bequests from various members of his family. He inherited his first town house from his sister Maddalena who died in 1430,¹⁹ but nevertheless preferred to reside at the Villa of Querceto near Ponte a Mensola, which he initially rented from his naturalised Ferrarese cousins Niccolò, Lorenzo, Uberto



1. Map of the Florentine *contado* showing the location of Strozzii villas in the fifteenth century. The numbers correspond to the list of Strozzii villas in Appendix B (drawn by Steven J. Allen, adapted from IGM, 1:100,000, Folio 106, 'Firenze', 1956).

and Tito di Nanne Strozzi. It was later confiscated and came into his own possession in 1436 (Fig. 2).²⁰ In 1438, his brother Salamone died and a codicil in their father's will came into effect ensuring that his farms at Campi went to Piero rather than to Salamone's own children.²¹ Finally, in 1449, a first cousin, Strozza di Smeraldo, bequeathed his town house and his estate at Loiano on Monte Morello to Piero. By then, he owned two of the grandest and best-situated of all Strozzi villas, Loiano and Querceto, and was so well provided for that he could afford to sell the scattered and less valuable lands at Campi.²²

Given the great variety in fortune and career patterns observable across the many branches of the Strozzi clan, the consistency and tenacity with which they held on to old rural estates is remarkable. It is also clear from the rich documentation that the main landowner's house or *casa da signore* was the most persistently guarded single item in the portfolio of inherited and bequeathed country properties. Scattered lands and smaller houses were more frequently and easily sold because they were a less important part of the patrimony, whereas the *casa da signore*, perceived as a crucial part of the family's sense of identity, was retained even in adverse circumstances.

SHARED OWNERSHIP AND DIVISION

The desire to maintain intact major dynastic estates came inevitably into conflict with the need to divide property among heirs.²³ Since the rule of primogeniture was not observed in central Italy,²⁴ a landowner could either leave his estate to be shared among his sons or heirs *per non diviso*, or he could separate his properties and distribute them among the individual heirs. Many country estates were maintained jointly by a widow and her sons until the widow's death or the sons' maturity,²⁵ and most of the Strozzi estates were shared between brothers at some time.²⁶ This shared arrangement seldom survived into the heirs' middle age, however, and even more rarely into the next generation. The selfish desire for sole possession, the urge towards economic independence, and the sheer inconvenience of housing several families under the same

roof led to the eventual division of households. So although a shared household was an experience suffered by the majority, it rarely lasted a lifetime, and the overcrowding that occurred when brothers married and produced children often precipitated division. At this point, the property might either be sold outside the family, or an exchange might be negotiated within the family. This sort of exchange took place between Francesco and Zanobi di Benedetto Strozzi, who originally shared their villa at Brozzi. When Francesco was forty with a wife and seven children his brother Zanobi gave up his half of the *casa da signore* in return for land in the district. Zanobi Strozzi, the manuscript illuminator and painter, was then twenty-two and had already bought another villa for himself at Palaiuola below the Badia Fiesolana.²⁷

Moreover, it was usually the principal family residences – in town or country – which were coveted by the whole family and which represented a large capital unit that could not be divided and apportioned as easily as pieces of land, shops or small houses. Thus, in 1430 and 1433, Francesco and Zanobi still shared the Brozzi villa, while all their other country lands and farmhouses had already been divided between them.²⁸ Similarly, in 1427, Messer Marcello and Rosso, the sons of Strozza Strozzi, submitted separate tax returns for all their property except for the Rocca di Campi and its lands, for which they wrote a third, joint tax return,²⁹ delaying the problem of division until the next generation.³⁰

The differences and quarrels arising from shared property are documented in tax returns and *ricordanze*. The ambiguity of these arrangements left much room for manipulation and exploitation within the family and almost inevitably gave rise to complex notarised exchanges, if not full-scale litigation.³¹ In one family, Giovanni, Tommaso and Begni, the sons of Jacopo d'Ubertino, all disagreed about the division of their patrimony and particularly their villa at Ponte di Mezzo, which was swapped from one brother to the other. It belonged to Giovanni in 1430 and was declared jointly by all three in 1442; but after a legal settlement in 1446, it was allotted to Tommaso, although Giovanni was still complaining in 1451 that he owned no country property and that



2. Querceto in the parish of S. Martino a Mensola, Nanne di Carlo Strozzi's house, that was confiscated and sold to Piero di Carlo Strozzi c. 1438.

the settlement was unfair, whereupon he was compensated for the loss of the main villa with a farm above Sesto.³²

Another division between the three sons of Benedetto di Marcuccio Strozzi is a typical example of a distribution that strove to provide each male heir with his fair share from a legacy that was not quite big enough to furnish each son with the ideal combination of a town and a country house. Marco lived with his wife and two children in his half of a town house in San Pancrazio while also owning a farm in Le Miccine.³³ His brother Bernardo, who had no wife or offspring, let the other half of the town house to one distant Strozzi cousin while he boarded in the house of another cousin Francesco di Zanobi, at the same time maintaining a farm in the Mugello inherited from his mother.³⁴ The third brother Giovanmaria inherited the principal family villa in Le Miccine and had to manage without a house in town.³⁵ For the purposes

of this division, therefore, the main country estate with its *casa da signore* was considered to be the equivalent of half a town house plus a farm.

Divisions might also be drawn up on paper for tax evasion or to document a legal agreement rather than as a true reflection of the living situation. This was the case for Marco di Goro, who owned two large rural estates with *case da signore* in the first half of the fifteenth century. The tax returns submitted by Marco and his sons in 1427, 1430 and 1433 state that they were living at the villa of Fornello while Mezzana remained uninhabited.³⁶ By 1442, Marco's son had died and separate returns were submitted by his daughter-in-law, who claimed to be living alone at Fornello, while eighty-eight-year-old Marco and his six grandsons all resided at Mezzana.³⁷ This was highly implausible, but the apparent division reflected separate patrimonies, that of the grandfather with his grandsons and heirs, and that of the daughter-in-law who had reclaimed her

dowry in the form of the Fornello villa. In addition, the tax dispensation for family domiciles meant that if both houses seemed to be inhabited, neither house would be taxed.³⁸

DOWRIES AND WOMEN'S PROPERTY

The provision of dowries was a chief reason for the sale or alienation of property, along with business failure and taxation. For many Florentines, finding large sums of cash for their daughters' dowries was the most financially demanding task they ever had to face.³⁹ Whatever the family's means, the amount required was relatively large and, although in 1425 the institution of a public dowry fund (the *Monte delle doti*) eased the situation and ensured the provision of cash or liquid assets, many less prosperous families had to sell real estate, give property in lieu of cash or supplement cash with land.⁴⁰ All these forms of compromise were adopted by the poorer members of the Strozzi clan.

Heather Gregory has suggested that land might be freely chosen as a substitute for cash when one Strozzi married another.⁴¹ Chiricho di Francesco Strozzi gave a farm and a farmhouse together with four other pieces of land at Capalle when his sister Nanna married Zanobi di Benedetto Strozzi.⁴² In this way the land remained within the clan and the dowry was simply reinvested with another branch of the family. Nevertheless, this also reflected a genuine shortage of cash and comparative abundance of land, for Chiricho's father Francesco had previously given three *moggia* of wheat and forty-eight florins worth of farm produce to the husband of his illegitimate daughter Maria.⁴³ When his father died in 1439 Chiricho returned his stepmother's dowry in the same fashion with a farm, a farmhouse and two extra pieces of land.⁴⁴

After the death of the paterfamilias, the burden of finding sufficient funds devolved on the brothers of the bride.⁴⁵ Indeed, this responsibility was often a condition laid down in the father's will. Thus, Carlo and Palla di Francesco gave their jointly owned farm at San Donnino as their sister's dowry.⁴⁶ Francesco di Piero likewise pledged his estates at Montemurlo to

his brother-in-law Manfredi Squarcialupi to the sum of 400 florins, still owing for his sister's dowry.⁴⁷ Whether this was a deposit as a form of guarantee against a future cash payment or whether he consigned the produce of these lands to Manfredi is not clear, but leases of land could constitute or supplement a dowry. For example, Giovanni di Marco di Goro leased a farm at Mezzana to his son-in-law from Prato for ten years. The lease was valued at 200 florins and covered part of the dowry.⁴⁸ Giovanni's other daughter Talana entered the nunnery of S. Nicolaio at Prato and her dowry for the convent included the produce from a field at Mezzana to be provided in perpetuity.⁴⁹ On both occasions, by leasing the land or consigning its produce instead of actually selling, Giovanni avoided breaking up his estate.

The ties of obligation however, loosened as the relation became more distant. Filippo Strozzi had the ready cash to pay the remaining 200 florins (*di sugello*) needed for the dowry of a distant cousin, Ginevra di Niccolò di Barla Strozzi. Yet this was barter not charity, for in return Filippo was to receive as much timber as he pleased over the next five years from Niccolò di Barla's woods at Gangalandi.⁵⁰ This arrangement must have suited Filippo particularly well in a period when he was building nearby at Lecceto and Le Selve and needed wood for construction purposes.⁵¹

Although the examples quoted here involved the disposal of the less valuable components of rural property, the provision of a dowry might equally force the sale of town property and reduce a family to the undignified alternative of full-time residence in the country. Marco di Benedetto sold his half of the town house he shared with his brother in S. Pancrazio to provide dowries for his three daughters and settled down for a long stay at the villa.⁵²

While the bride's family was worrying over the provision of the dowry, the groom was looking forward to the arrival of new assets. Just as the wife brought fresh blood to her husband's lineage, so her dowry might bring lands outside the Strozzi district into their possession, as did the wife of Bartolommeo di Loderigo Strozzi with her villa at Torri in the Val di Pesa.⁵³ Such cases were rare, however, as Kirshner and Molho have noted: 'cash and liquid assets (Monte

Comune credits) predominated in dotal settlements. The dowry fund was also an extension of the practice whereby real property, when possible, did not travel with a wife to her husband and his family, but remained with her father, brothers and male kin.⁵⁴ Moreover, when the wife did bring her own properties to her husband's family, those were the first to be sold, and they did not, on the whole, remain to diversify the topography of Strozzi rural holdings. Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi identified with her husband's family so entirely, and fulfilled her duty towards them so conscientiously, that when she inherited her brother Zanobi's villa at Antella, to the fury of the other Macinghi, she sold it two years later.⁵⁵ It is significant that she chose to sell this before any of her husband's larger properties. Although all of Matteo's real estate had come to Alessandra in restitution of her dowry of 1,600 florins, she must have considered that the Strozzi estate should, if possible, be preserved for the family's male offspring, while the Antella farm was not part of her sons' agnatic patrimony.⁵⁶

On the other hand, Strozzi women who married into other families might make welcome contributions to the patrimonies of their own agnatic kin: Mona Antonia, daughter of Lorenzo d'Uberto Strozzi, made a present (*donazione*) of half of the villa of Galluzzo in the Val di Marina to the sons of Francesco di Benedetto Strozzi. They subsequently bought the whole estate and it became Vanni di Francesco's principal villa.⁵⁷ Similarly, Chiricho di Francesco, who already owned farms at Capalle, was left more land in that district by his paternal aunt Isabetta Brunelleschi, which had been given to her as restitution of her dowry.⁵⁸

Despite the dominant pattern of patrilineal inheritance continually reasserted by jurists,⁵⁹ in practice women often did assume control over property, if only for a limited period of their lives. Although initially the dowry was kept just out of the bride's reach, transferred from her father to her husband, in widowhood women assumed a new role both as interim caretakers of their husband's property if their sons had not yet reached maturity and, above all, as property owners in their own right after restitution of their dowries.⁶⁰ Because political banishment did not usually include women, they might also have greater

responsibility while husbands and sons were in exile, as Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi and Marietta, Palla di Nofri's wife, both did.⁶¹ Thus, Marietta Strozzi returned to Florence while her husband was unable to, and sold property on his behalf.⁶² Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi sought the advice of her eldest son Filippo in frequent letters and received practical help and moral support from relations in Florence,⁶³ but her correspondence reveals that she was fully aware of her legal rights and could defend them actively when the need arose.⁶⁴ She sold property regularly after her husband's exile from 1437 until 1466 when her sons were free to return to Florence. Significantly, her letters do not mention the need to solicit male relatives for permission before any of these transactions. Although women were legally subject to a male guardian on their husband's death and still had to be emancipated before they could sign legal documents,⁶⁵ nevertheless it seems that in actual practice, the constraints placed upon widows were not as restrictive as the jurists, the statutes and the notarial records imply; and it is likely that these legal formalities were sometimes bypassed or compromises found.⁶⁶

Selvaggia Gianfigliuzzi is another example of a Strozzi widow who pursued an active role in the administration of property. In 1491, on the death of her husband Filippo di Matteo Strozzi, she was appointed guardian (*tutrice*) of her two sons, Lorenzo and Filippo the Younger, and was the administrator (*amministratrice*) of their estate, which was two-thirds of her husband's entire estate.⁶⁷ There are separate account books for the administration of her sons' property and for Selvaggia's own farms, which she inherited from her Gianfigliuzzi relations.⁶⁸ With her sister Cosa, Selvaggia shared two big farms in the Pesa Valley that had come to them on their father's death – not as part of his patrimony but as the equivalent of their mother's dowry.⁶⁹ Selvaggia actively developed her holdings in the Val di Pesa. She bought more farms, improved the lands, rebuilt the labourers' houses and later gained possession of the main Gianfigliuzzi villa of Il Corno.⁷⁰ Selvaggia did not run her estates unaided. Two trusted relatives were employed as factors: Piero di Messer Michele Strozzi administered the Strozzi properties,⁷¹ while her sister's son, Antonio di Francesco Giugni,

supervised the Gianfigliuzzi farms and rebuilding in the Val di Pesa.⁷² It is possible that her purchase of Il Corno from her brother Battista for 640 florins was a form of loan, since the household and farm accounts suggest that Battista continued to live at the villa,⁷³ and, as a rich widow, Selvaggia was certainly in a position to offer charity to her family.

PURCHASE

The most frequent type of purchase made by the Strozzi during the fifteenth century was small scale and involved odd pieces of land either near established family farms or intended to complement the type of land that the family already owned. The level of prosperity was not sufficient for most members of the clan to afford new farms let alone a whole new estate.

Francesco di Benedetto Strozzi was unusual in that he was a Medici partisan and, although he never rejected his Strozzi kin, he continued to prosper in the 1430s and 1440s.⁷⁴ Thus Francesco bought his second villa just along the street from his first in the village of Brozzi, and his sons extended the Brozzi lands with eight extra fields that they bought in the late 1450s and 1460s.⁷⁵ His son Vanni di Francesco created a large estate at Galluzzo near Travalle, northwest of Calenzano.⁷⁶ The formation of this estate gives a clear idea of how such a villa was created in the fifteenth century. The *casa da signore* and its farm formed the nucleus of the holding, and a family bequest helped provide the impetus for expansion (Fig. 3). The *casa da signore* at Galluzzo was acquired in two halves, the first bought for a mere thirty florins in June 1458 and the second given the following year by a female relative, Antonia di Lorenzo d'Uberto Strozzi. This donation may have been foreseen because a series of land purchases and exchanges began in July 1458. Meadows and woods in adjacent parishes were bought, and more distant lands were given in exchange for pieces adjoining Galluzzo. By 1469, the lands at Galluzzo were listed in seventeen pieces, farmed by one family of sharecroppers.⁷⁷ Consolidation and extension continued throughout the 1470s when another tenant farmer's house and an oil press were bought together with woods, meadows and arable fields.⁷⁸

At both the beginning and the end of the century, Palla di Nofri (before his exile) and Filippo di Matteo (after his years in exile) acquired large rural estates, which are the only outstanding examples among the Strozzi of large-scale rural investors. However the similarity between their policies ends there, for, despite Filippo's great wealth, his country properties were not exceptionally extensive: three villas for his own habitation and other farms mostly clustered around those villas. Palla, on the other hand, declared far more country land than any other Florentine in his tax returns of 1427, 1430 and 1433, and his properties extended as far afield as Pisa, Carmignano and Prato. He owned at least eight *case da signore*, although only two or three seem to have been furnished for his own habitation.⁷⁹ In his accumulation of country property, Palla di Nofri Strozzi was continuing a project initiated by his father,⁸⁰ just as construction and decoration of the Sacristy of Santa Trinita in Florence was initiated by Nofri.⁸¹ When Nofri died in 1417, he already owned large expanses of land, and Palla went on to extend them, creating the vast holdings he declared in 1427, which were not equalled by any other Florentine until Lorenzo de' Medici's extravagant purchases of the 1480s and early 1490s.⁸² The year 1427, however, marked the high point of Palla's wealth, for property tax and the series of forced loans made by the commune in the late 1420s and early 1430s hit him hard, and he had already sold a number of properties by the time of his exile in 1434.⁸³

Although his wealth was comparable, Filippo di Matteo's attitude was in direct contrast to Palla di Nofri's. He made no attempt to accumulate huge estates distributed over a wide area. The first villa bought after his return was a clannish choice, an old Strozzi property at Capalle that had belonged to Ubertino di Tommaso and was sold to Filippo by Marcuccio di Carlo Strozzi and his brothers Niccolò, Girolamo and Paolo for 1,000 florins on 18 May 1475.⁸⁴ Filippo continued to enlarge this estate, buying the surrounding fields at Ciriegio and storage buildings within the *castello* walls at Capalle.⁸⁵

Two years later, Filippo bought his main residential villa at Santuccio between the villages of San Donnino and San Mauro for 1,250 florins.⁸⁶ Although he bought the *casa da signore* and its farm from the heirs



3. Galluzzo in the parish of S. Maria a Travalle, Val di Marina, Vanni di Francesco Strozzi's house, rebuilt c. 1460–80.

of Giovanni degli Alberti, this property had belonged to Filippo's great uncle Pinaccio di Filippo Strozzi in the 1420s and early 1430s⁸⁷ until it was confiscated and consigned to the Alberti in payment of a debt in 1436.⁸⁸ Moreover, the next-door oratory of San Giovanni Battista with its farm had come to the Strozzi from the Manfredi in the fourteenth century when Lena di Filippo Manfredi married Filippo's great-great-grandfather Messer Lionardo di Loso Strozzi.⁸⁹ Pinaccio together with other Strozzi had administered the oratory farm in the 1430s, and this land together with the patronage rights to the oratory were inherited by Filippo and his brother Lorenzo.⁹⁰ The purchase of Santuccio should therefore be regarded as the reacquisition of an ancestral property further motivated by their continuing patronage of the adjacent oratory.

In early 1484, Filippo bought his third villa, in the Bisenzio valley at Maglio. The initial cost was less, but the development of the farms required more labour, and he continued to enlarge and improve his lands there until his death. As late as August 1490, Filippo bought another farm at Maglio including a large farmhouse complex with extensive lands.⁹¹

In addition to the three residential villas, Filippo bought a big farm at San Donato in Fronzano in June 1483⁹² and four farms at Le Miccine between 1482 and 1490.⁹³ This policy of expansion was continued by Filippo's widow Selvaggia and her sons. Filippo had bought two kilns at San Cresci a Campi with land for quarrying, which were meant to serve the needs of the palace building project in town.⁹⁴ After his death, Filippo's heirs bought more land at San Cresci a Campi and vineyards next to their other kiln at San Piero a Ponti, as well as more fields at Santuccio and Maglio.⁹⁵

RENTING

It was not common practice to rent *case da signore* in the fifteenth century. The reasons for this are that, although it may appear that they were only inhabited by the landowner in the summer and for brief periods during the rest of the year, in fact there was usually a servant or factor in residence, and visits from the children and women of the family were more frequent and lengthy.⁹⁶ Availability to the extended family, and

in time of heat or plague, or when whim dictated, was a key factor in villa-owning. Besides, a surprising number of the Strozzi were living year-round at their villas in this period, so their *case da signore* were not for rent.

An exception to this practice was made by Filippo di Matteo who let his newly purchased villa at Santuccio to Lucrezia Tornabuoni, widow of Piero de' Medici for five years from 1477 to 1482 at nine florins per annum. Lucrezia did not inhabit the villa herself, but handed it on to her attorney (*mallevadore*) Bernardo Baroncelli.⁹⁷ As a young artist, the miniaturist Zanobi di Benedetto Strozzi had lived in his villa near the Badia Fiesolana, but in 1446 he moved into town and let his country house to four widows, one of whom was a vowess (*pinzochera*). In this case, the rented villa may have functioned as a religious retreat for a small group of pious women or as an inexpensive abode for poor widows.⁹⁸ This property was particularly suitable for this purpose because it was relatively close to town, there were gardens but no farmland to administer, and the rent was only five florins a year. On the other hand, Piero di Carlo Strozzi paid a far higher rent of fifty florins a year for the lease of the villa of Querceto, which included the crops from the large estate.⁹⁹ This was a long-term arrangement between Piero and his first cousins Niccolò, Lorenzo, Uberto and Tito, whose father Messer Nanne Strozzi had long since settled in Ferrara. Their failure to pay taxes eventually led to the villa's confiscation and sale at a cheap price to the tenant Piero di Carlo.¹⁰⁰

The wish to keep property within the clan is reflected in urban rent arrangements, a large proportion of which were between relatives. Bernardo di Benedetto, for example, let his half of a town house to one relative for fifteen florins per annum, while he himself was paying twenty-four florins for board and lodging (*la tornata e spese*) to another relative.¹⁰¹ Bernardo's brother Marco mostly lived at his villa at Le Miccine, but on his visits to town he moved from one relative to the next: 'I live most of the time in the country, and when I come into Florence I sometimes stay with one and sometimes with another of my relatives, and still I need to rent a house'.¹⁰² A relative could also be trusted to care for and repair

clan property. Niccolò di Lionardo and his brother Jacopo lived abroad all their working lives and let their Florentine house to Niccolò di Jacopo d'Ubertino Strozzi. Niccolò di Lionardo, known for his extraordinary portrait sculpted in marble by Mino da Fiesole (see Fig. 116 in Chapter 7), was busy managing his bank in Rome and complained that he needed a tenant to prevent the old family residence from falling down, although much of the rent was consumed by the cost of repairs.¹⁰³

The dense network of family ties is nowhere better illustrated than in these mutual arrangements for renting town property.¹⁰⁴ Intense activity in the rental market also reflects the scarcity of large sums of capital in the family in this period. Residential mobility among the Strozzi did not reflect the large choice afforded by prosperity, but rather the shortage of housing in Florence and financial insecurity. Although he was no longer poor by the 1440s, Piero di Carlo's movements are characteristic of the local situation. Apart from his villa at Querceto where he frequently stayed, Piero was renting a palace in town from Rinieri d'Antonio Strozzi for twenty-two florins a year, at the same time as he was letting his own town house for thirteen florins.¹⁰⁵ To pay his debts, however, in 1441 Rinieri d'Antonio sold his villa at Brozzi where he had been living and took his town palace back in 1442.¹⁰⁶ Piero di Carlo was then obliged to reside at the Querceto villa for a few years, with the intention of moving back into his town house on the Corso degli Strozzi, which he had been letting.¹⁰⁷ The general picture gained from such documents is of frequent shifts between town and country bases and equally frequent moves within town itself. Although Piero is the only member of the Strozzi family who rented his main country residence at one stage, the greater desirability, the shortage and the expense of town houses meant that many of the family were obliged to rent palaces or apartments in Florence.¹⁰⁸

When cash was short, rural proprietors could loan their property to creditors as a convenient method of payment. Benedetto di Pieraccione let his villa Il Cortile at Capalle to Conte Spinelli for five years as a way of repaying his debt to him. During this time Spinelli was to receive the produce from the farm and,