

Labor Use and Landlord Control: Sharecropping and Household Structure in Fifteenth-Century Tuscany

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Abstract The prevalence of large and extended families among sharecroppers in northern and central Italy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been well documented in the historical demographic literature. Landlords relied on tenants' extended household structure to provide a large labor force that increased their income. In earlier centuries, however, landlords' involvement in agricultural production may have had little impact on household structure. Evidence from fifteenth-century Tuscany illustrates that household extension was not as common among sharecroppers during this period of time. Qualitative analyses of personal correspondence and tax declarations from the fifteenth century suggest reasons why landlords' management techniques did not lead to household extension among sharecroppers. Unlike landlords in later periods of time, fifteenth-century landlords relied more on rearranging plots of land than particular demographic practices, because land consolidation was still in progress and farms were not fixed geographically. In addition, during the earlier period of time, sharecropping was less institutionalized and landlords had less power over their tenants. These findings suggest that sharecropping, as a tenurial form, did not necessarily lead to household extension. Instead, the effect of the tenurial form depended on the nature of sharecropping and the degree of landlords' power.

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The study of historical household structure is an exciting field, because of the debates that mark its terrain and because an understanding of contemporary household structure requires knowledge of households in the past. Describing contemporary households as "modern" or even "post-modern", requires the term, "pre-modern", as a referent. Indeed, historical families are often viewed through a "distant mirror" (Tuchman 1978), in which the living see the dead as themselves or, more often, as the inverted image of themselves. This connection between past and present is reflected in the academic debates over the historical prevalence of nuclear and extended households. The commonly accepted scholarly wisdom about the size and composition of historical households has been frequently reinterpreted, depending on whether these households are seen to be similar to contemporary ones, or their opposites.

This article inserts the paradoxical case of the household structure of fifteenth-century Tuscan sharecroppers into this debate. Sharecropping, a form of leasing in which the rent is a share of the harvest, plays a central role in this literature. Historical studies show that sharecroppers often lived in large, extended families, casting doubt on earlier arguments that the nuclear family was uniformly the

most common pre-industrial household structure (Kertzer 1989, 1991; Laslett 1965). (Of course, the latter was itself an argument against an even earlier position that extended households predominated before industrialization!) Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber's evidence (1985:298), showing that the household structure of sharecroppers in fifteenth-century Tuscany was similar to that of other rural inhabitants, contradicts the argument that sharecropping, because of its labor requirements, led to extended household structure. This article resolves this paradox by considering some features of agricultural production and landlords' practices that may have accounted for the comparatively lower incidence of household extension among sharecroppers in this time and place. I argue that historical household structure is neither the same as, nor different from, contemporary households. Instead, I build on the recent sociological tradition showing that household structure is everywhere shaped by local social and economic influences that must be understood in particular historical contexts, not by generalizations about modernity.

Theories of Household Structure

Classic structural-functionalist, modernization, and Marxist theories argued that large, extended families were not well adapted to capitalist and industrial economies, and that these families were replaced by nuclear ones in modern societies (Engels 1972 [1884]; Le Play 1871; Parsons 1952; Parsons and Bales 1953; see review in Ruggles 1987:13-16). In sharp contrast, Laslett (1965, 1972) claimed that arguments about the rise of the nuclear family were not grounded in historical research. Laslett claimed that empirical studies showed that nuclear families predominated in pre-industrial societies.

Demographic theories of the effects of mortality and age of marriage also have been used to critique theories of the shift from extended to nuclear households. Levy (1965) argued that nuclear families predominated in pre-industrial societies because high mortality rates decreased the opportunities for kin to coreside and, as a consequence, placed strict limits on the possibilities for household extension.¹ From a different perspective, Ruggles (1987) used demographic theory to argue that household extension increased during industrialization, because declining mortality rates and age at marriage increased the opportunities for kin to coreside. In contrast to theories stressing the importance of demography, Wachter, Hammel, and Laslett (1978) argued that demographic factors did not preclude household extension and that other factors, either economic or cultural, accounted for the historical predominance of nuclear households.

Rural households are central to these debates, because household structure and economic production are linked when agriculture is labor intensive and family members form the labor force. Household extension may be a strategy to provide a large labor force to increase agricultural production. As Chayanov suggested (see Thorner, Kerblay, and Smith 1966), economic production based on the labor of family members may have incentives distinct from those of capitalist enterprises. Similarly, Seccombe (1992:26-27) argued that there is often a general correspondence between demographic and economic factors, and specifically between modes of production and family forms. He distinguished between peasant family forms in the feudal mode of production, in which the use of family members as agricultural laborers closely tied demographic reproduction to economic production, and capitalist family forms, in which the direct connection between workers' demographic reproduction and economic production was mediated by the labor market (Seccombe 1992:37-39, 248). For example, when landlords use wage labor on their agricultural holdings, the relationship between economic and demographic factors is weak, because wage laborers are hired as individuals, not as family units. Finally, in agricultural societies, household structure may be a strategy to preserve holdings and to transmit land between generations through inheritance (Berkner 1972).

Sharecropping, in particular, is crucial to debates over historic forms of household structure. Sharecropping is a common form of land tenure, found in a wide variety of historical and contemporary contexts (Aymard 1982; Bhaduri 1973; Byres 1983; Cheung 1969; Chirot 1976; Finkler 1978; Jonsson 1992; Keegan 1983; Lampland 1995; Lehmann 1986; Mann 1990; Morooka and Hayami 1989; Nee and Young 1991; Reid 1976; Robertson 1980; Roumasset 1976; Royce 1993; Swain 1985; Wells 1996; Yoon 1975). Studies of sharecroppers provide counterpoints to arguments that the nuclear family predominated in pre-industrial societies, because they show that sharecroppers often lived in large, extended families (Kertzer 1984:8-12, 1989, 1991). These studies also cast doubt on demographic theories suggesting that high mortality necessarily limited household extension. Among many sharecropping households, high mortality did not prevent household formation when it was a useful economic strategy to provide an agricultural labor force. Thus, economic explanations, such the impact of labor demands on household structure, can be used to critique demographic theories.

Economic explanations of household structure also can be framed in terms of the effects of property rights. Theories based on property rights explain how access to land or income affects demographic practices, such as fertility, mortality, marriage, or household structure. Sharecropping's salient property rights are the landlord's and tenant's

right to a share of the yield. Analyses based on these property rights suggest that sharecropping is particularly labor intensive, and as a consequence, requires large and extended households. Classic economists, such as Smith ([1776] 1937), Mill ([1848] 1915), or Marshall ([1980] 1964; see reviews in Perteu 1986; Wells 1996:3-5), argued that since neither landlord nor tenant had a full set of property rights to the yield, both landlords and tenants had fewer incentives to work hard and invest than owner-cultivators. Because landlords have disincentives for investment, and because the cost of labor inputs to the landlord are low given the form of the rent, landlords rely on their tenants' labor (Cohen and Galassi 1990:646-647). Similarly, Perteu (1986:31-33) showed how sharecropping can be labor intensive because landlords' income is generally maximized when there are many adult laborers and few dependents.

Marxists consider how property rights allow landlords to extract surplus during the labor process (Lenin [1899] 1956; Marx [1894] 1977; see reviews in Perteu 1986; Wells 1996:3-5). Sharecropping is viewed as a device for extracting surplus from the peasantry in "feudal" settings (Bhaduri 1973; Pearce 1983:52-65; Robertson 1982:449). Some Marxist treatments assume that sharecropping is labor intensive because share-tenants use unpaid household labor (Lehmann 1986:603). This assumption often draws on the Chayanovian perspective that agricultural production based on family labor has unique features. Share-tenants are not necessarily separated from the means of their own subsistence. Although they do not own land, they may possess the means of production and produce primarily for their own consumption. Sharecropping may be particularly labor intensive, according to this view, because sharecroppers not only use household labor, but also because landlords remove a large proportion of the surplus, forcing share-tenants to exploit more thoroughly their household members. Theories based on property rights, therefore, can be used to suggest that sharecropping is labor intensive, requiring large and extended households.

The relation between property rights and demographic outcomes is central to much demographic work, even when the effects of property rights are not explicitly discussed. Generally, the demographic literature points to two effects: the form of property rights and the extent of such rights. For example, fertility is affected by the size of the landholding (the extent of the property right) and by the type of land tenure (the form of the property right) (Clay and Johnson 1992; Laidig, Schutjer, and Stokes 1981; see also the review in Schutjer and Stokes 1982:232-238).

It is not surprising that property rights are central to debates over household structure, as they are also important in other sociological research. The question, what effect do property rights have on

economic outcomes, is a classic one in sociology and economics (starting with Smith and Marx as the previous discussion shows). There is a recent resurgence of interest in the relationship between property rights and economic outcomes because of the nature and direction of transitions to market economies and privatization in China and post-communist Eastern Europe (Kornai 1990; Lipton and Sachs 1990; Lu and Selden 1987; Nee 1996; Stark 1996; Szelényi 1998). Property rights are key to numerous substantive debates in agriculture as well. In the neo-Marxist debates over the transition from feudalism to capitalism, Dobb (1947), Hilton (1978), and Brenner (1985) all argue that the form of property rights to the agricultural yield, and in particular, fixed-term leasing with wage-labor, was central to the development of capitalism. Similarly, the "Leninist-Chayanovist" debate discusses whether household production can support agricultural development or whether a complete transition to wage-labor is necessary (Friedmann 1980; Goodman and Redclift 1982; Mann 1990; Szelényi 1988).

Incorporating Landlords' Practices

This article addresses these broad debates over historical forms of household structure and the connection between demographic outcomes and property rights by considering the relationship between sharecropping and household structure. I critique the property rights perspective by showing how the same form of property right, sharecropping, can be associated with different demographic outcomes, in this case, household structure. Although sharecropping is by definition a tenurial form in which the rent is a share of the harvest, this property right (to the yield or income from a farm) can be employed in any number of contexts. Of course, others have noted that sharecropping is not a unitary phenomenon. It is a flexible and adaptable tenurial form, shaped by many economic, cultural, and historic patterns (Mann 1984:414; Singh 1989:34). One major distinction is between share-tenancy used by rural smallholders to adjust the amount of land under cultivation to the number of household members and share-tenancy between large landowners and landless rural inhabitants (Lehmann 1986; Silverman 1975; Yoon 1975). Extended household structure is usually linked to the latter form of sharecropping, especially in northern and central Italy. Thus, historians of this region consider sharecropping in its institutionalized form, not just as a rental contract (Poni 1978:203; Silverman 1975:46).

Thus, the historical literature begins to provide a critique of the property rights perspective, by suggesting that household structure is not necessarily given by the form of the property right, the right to

a share of the yield, but by the conditions surrounding the institutionalization of this property right. This literature provides some hints as to why this might be so, but leaves these suggestions underanalyzed. In addition, although scholars note that sharecropping has a different nature in different places, there have been fewer attempts to consider factors, other than property rights, that may account for the appearance of these different forms of sharecropping. This article expands on some of these underdeveloped suggestions and possibilities for analyzing share-tenancy. In particular, I explain why sharecropping may have been associated with different patterns of household extension in different time periods by considering how this tenurial form was institutionalized. In general, then, I argue that the property rights to the yield associated with sharecropping do not determine tenants' household structure, but that the effect of the tenurial form is mediated by other social factors.

The extent of landlords' power is an important influence on sharecroppers' household structure. Although the links between economic production and household structure are found in variety of tenurial forms when the family is the labor force, landlords have a unique role in sharecropping because both the landlord and the tenant have rights to a share of the harvest.² Because of the landlords' interest in the harvest, when sharecropping is a class phenomenon, that is, when landlords and tenants form different social classes based on the ownership of land, different constellations of landlords' power and management techniques may influence tenants' demographic practices.³ The importance of landlords' power is frequently mentioned in the literature on sharecropping, but its effect is underanalyzed. For example, Cohen and Galassi (1990:646-647) suggest that sharecropping may be labor intensive when powerful landlords force powerless tenants to use more labor than in other tenurial forms. Similarly, Kertzer (1991:160) suggested that household extension among sharecroppers was partially a result of landlords' power. When sharecropping contracts were renewed yearly, sharecroppers were under considerable pressure to maximize their adult family workforce or to be evicted by powerful landlords (Kertzer 1991:160). The degree or the extent of landlords' power is not inherent in the property right, since both landlord and tenant have a right to a share of the yield. Instead, the extent of landlords' power is given by broader social conditions.

Several scenarios of landlords' practices can be outlined. First, when landlords are powerful and can demand particular demographic practices, there may be direct links between economic production and demographic reproduction, because landlords' income – a share of the yield – is generally maximized when there are many adult laborers and few dependents (Pertev 1986:31-33). When the family

is the unit of production, landlords can, within broad limits, increase their income by increasing the number of laborers, that is, family members, and may encourage (or demand when they have enough influence) extended household formation. Thus, landlords may prefer laterally extended families, in which married brothers coreside, or vertically extended families, in which parents and their married offspring coreside, because of the large labor forces these families provide. Second, in other contexts, landlords may be involved in their tenancies and influence the production process, but their management techniques may not make use of tenants' demographic practices. Landlords may not be powerful enough to demand certain demographic practices from their tenants. Under these conditions, there will be little relation between land tenure and tenants' household structure. In contrast to these two scenarios, in which landlords are involved in their tenancies, absentee or powerless landlords may be uninvolved in the management of their properties, content to take whatever income or produce the farms provide, leaving most production decisions to their tenants (Roumasset 1976:76-77). Such landlords also may have little influence on their tenants' demographic practices.

In this article, I consider the first two scenarios. The historical literature provides numerous examples of the first scenario, when landlords' influence seemed to create large extended households. This pattern was found among sharecroppers in northern and central Italy, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Fifteenth-century Tuscany provides an example of the second scenario. I present archival evidence suggesting that landlords' management techniques were less dependent upon tenants' household structure.

The household structure of sharecroppers in fifteenth-century Tuscany is a particularly interesting empirical case. Kertzer (1984:79) suggested that the association between household extension and sharecropping in central and northern Italy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries originated during this earlier period of time. The evidence from fifteenth-century Tuscany, however, is mixed. Although Tuscan sharecroppers' households in the fifteenth century were often extended, it is unclear whether they were larger than the households of other rural inhabitants (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:298). In addition, the prevalence of household extension may have been lower than in later centuries (Kertzer 1984:79-80). In this article, instead of considering the overall extent of household structure in relatively large geographic regions, I examine a few small parishes, to consider how landlords' and tenants' concrete practices, as well as sharecropping's institutionalized form, influenced household structure.

Scenario 1: Landlords Influence Tenants' Household Structure

In northern and central Italy, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sharecropping was associated with large, extended families (Angeli 1983; Barbagli 1984; Caiati 1984; Doveri 1982; Gill 1983; Kertzer 1977, 1984:57-85, 1989, 1991; Kertzer and Brettell 1987; Kertzer and Hogan 1988, 1989; Poni 1978; Pratt 1994; Silverman 1968, 1975; Tittarelli 1991; Torti 1981). Some sharecropping communities had the highest rates of household extension in western Europe (Kertzer and Hogan 1989:53). Studies of communities in Tuscany, Umbria, Emilia-Romagna, and Lombardy show that between fifty and seventy-five percent of sharecroppers lived in multiple family households (Barbagli 1984:212; Kertzer 1977:342-343, 1984:75-80, 1989:4-5; Kertzer and Brettell 1987:93; Viazzo and Albera 1990:472). Similar tenancy arrangements were also found in the Friuli and seem to have been associated with large families (Holmes 1989:50-51, 66-67).⁴

This pattern of household extension was linked to landlords' power and a particular, highly institutionalized form of sharecropping, in which share-tenants primarily leased land from absentee landlords. In northern and central Italy, between the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, rural settlement patterns were altered dramatically. Where rural inhabitants once lived in nucleated villages and worked scattered plots of land, they increasingly became residents of consolidated and isolated farms. This process was known as *appoderamento*, the making of *poderi*, compact farms (Barbagli 1984:203-215; Giorgetti 1974:58-64, 148-156). *Appoderamento* consolidated land into contiguous farms characterized by polyculture. Farms became fixed geographically and their existence as units was largely independent of individual landlords and tenants. Although small pieces of property were occasionally bought and sold, farms were generally bought, sold, leased, or inherited as intact units. Farms were identified by unique and stable names. In addition, many landlords organized their holdings into groups of farms (called *fattorie* in Tuscany), composed of several farms, often organized around a central olive press and equipment for making wine. The landlord often hired a manager (*fattore*) and several assistants to supervise the sharecroppers. Business between the two parties was often conducted on the *fattoria* (Gill 1983:147).

Once fixed geographically, farms had an optimal number of adult workers and an ideal mix of crops (Caiati 1984:114; Doveri 1982:68; Poni 1978:205-207). The farm was supposed to provide enough produce to make the family self-sufficient and the farm's physical assets were supposed to engage all of the family's labor (Giorgetti 1974:151-152). Since the farms were fixed entities, families were

under considerable pressure to adapt to the farms by maintaining the optimal family size. If the family grew too large, some of the nuclear families could be resettled or dismissed (Gill 1983:147; Poni 1978:205, 217). Day laborers or hired hands could also be used to fill temporary labor shortages (Gill 1983:147). Landlords frequently adjusted family size to farm size by moving tenants between farms. Farm size, then, was linked to household size: landlords gave larger farms to larger families (Kertzer 1977, 1984, 1991; Poni 1978; Tittarelli 1991). This balance between the number of family members and the size and nature of the farm was the key to retaining a lease and staying on good terms with the landlord.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most landlords were very powerful and controlled agricultural production. Landlords and their managers regulated most aspects of their tenants' lives, including agricultural production, mobility, domestic arrangements, and marriage (Gill 1983:147). Because landlords were powerful, they could virtually require tenants to adopt certain demographic practices, either by stipulating certain behaviors in the leases or by threatening eviction. Most leases only lasted one year, so landlords had frequent opportunities to enforce their demands. Landlords reserved the right to dismiss tenants at any time, to divide a large family into smaller units, and to resettle tenants onto other farms. The leases stipulated that all the household members had to work on the farm. Landlords frequently loaned grain and cash to tenants. These debts tended to accumulate and tied the families to their landlords. Landlords also tried to prevent families from accumulating enough resources to become independent, and thus, did not provide more resources (or a larger farm) than necessary (Barbagli 1984; Bianchi 1983; Caiati 1984; Doveri 1982; Gill 1983; Giorgetti 1974; Kertzer 1977, 1984, 1989, 1991; Kertzer and Brettell 1987; Kertzer and Hogan 1988, 1989; McArdle 1978; Poni 1978; Pratt 1994; Silverman 1968, 1975; Tittarelli 1991). Some sharecroppers were required to sell their surpluses to the landlords' centralized facilities (Gill 1983:147; Giorgetti 1974).

During this period of time, sharecroppers responded to landlords' pressures to maximize the adult labor force. Since agricultural production was labor intensive, the size of the labor force was a major determinant of the landlords' income. Thus, it was to the landlord's advantage to have many adult laborers. To retain their tenancies, families were pressured to maintain a large household. A large labor force comprised of many adult male workers, often several nuclear families headed by brothers, was usually essential for working these consolidated farms (Kertzer 1977, 1984, 1991; Silverman 1968). Nuclear families, with a small adult labor force, were at an extreme disadvantage in obtaining or retaining a lease

(Kertzer and Brettell 1987:93). Similarly, the use of family labor on share-tenancies encouraged high fertility among sharecroppers, even after others had adopted fertility control (Kertzer and Hogan 1989:148-173). The pressure to retain a lease was especially intense in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when population growth and the rise of capitalism increased the competition for sharecropped farms (Kertzer and Brettell 1987:93; Tittarelli 1991:276).

Appoderamento, the institutionalization of sharecropping, and landlords' power were associated with sharecroppers' large and extended families. The incidence of household extension increased as sharecropping spread (Barbagli 1984; Poni 1978:226). The creation of new *poderi*, consolidated farms, and the resettlement of rural inhabitants from nucleated villages to these isolated farms increased the proportion of sharecroppers in the population and the average size and complexity of the households (Barbagli 1984:203-215; Giorgetti 1974:148-156; Viazzo and Albera 1990:470-1). This process has been documented most thoroughly for Tuscany, though several studies suggest that *appoderamento* was connected to the spread of household extension in Lombardy, Veneto, and Emilia (see review in Viazzo and Albera 1990:471-472). Although complex family structure had been common for many centuries in central and northern Italy, it seemed to have reached its height in the nineteenth century. This increase in the prevalence of household extension was linked to the decline in mortality rates that led to longer lifespans, and consequently, more opportunities for individuals to coreside (Kertzer 1989:8; Poni 1978:226); demographic growth that increased the competition among tenants for farms, and therefore, increased the pressure to conform with landlords' demands for tenants to live in extended households (Kertzer 1984:106-107); and the intensification of agricultural cultivation that required a larger labor force (Poni 1978:226).

McArdle's study (1978) of the sharecropped farms of the Medici Grand Dukes at Altopascio in Tuscany provides a number of details about their farms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The lands of the Grand Dukes were administered in the typical Tuscan fashion. A single unit of administration, the *fattoria*, was comprised of multiple farms, *poderi*, which were designed to be complete entities and to support a family (McArdle 1978:25). During this period of time, the farms became fixed geographical units. Though it was sometimes possible to add or subtract some fields from a given farm, the administrators generally respected the identity of the farm over the peasant family. Thus, when the land/labor ratio became suboptimal for agricultural production, the managers usually changed the size of the family, not the outline of the farm (McArdle 1978:159). The low

lands of Altopascio were fertile, but frequently flooded and poorly drained. The Medici and their administrators tried to increase the productivity of this land by raising the elevation of low lying lands through a series of earthen dams and irrigation canals (McArdle 1978:66-68). While these innovations were not always successful, they indicate that the Medici were enterprising landlords, not merely *rentiers* (McArdle 1978:77). At Altopascio, landlords and tenants divided the returns from the harvest and livestock and the expenses of the farm (McArdle 1978:69-71).

In the early-seventeenth century, some rural inhabitants still owned land and they supplemented their shareholdings with produce or income from their own property (McArdle 1978:118). By the eighteenth century, however, few tenants owned land. Share-leases prohibited other employment and the cultivation of other property (even the tenants' own, in the unlikely event that they owned some) (McArdle 1978:78-82, 160). As a result, tenants became more dependent upon their landlords and their loans, for tenants had no opportunities for income apart from their shareholdings (McArdle 1978:109-112). Tenants also became increasingly dependent upon landlords and their managers for food and supplies. Tenants tended to be deeply indebted to the landlord (McArdle 1978:72, 110-111). As these debts mounted, tenants were left with insufficient food to survive and with inadequate materials to work the farm. Many tenants were forced to plead with the manager to obtain sufficient advances to work the farm (McArdle 1978:162-163). Tenants could be jailed for speaking disrespectfully to their landlords or managers (McArdle 1978:167).

The landlords and their managers strictly controlled family life, including the number of individuals on each farm, and, as a consequence, living arrangements and marriages. Tenants had to obtain permission from the landlord to marry (McArdle 1978:164). Landlords could evict tenants, either individuals or entire families. They could also resettle families onto other farms (McArdle 1978:146-147). Although some tenants stayed on farms for long periods of time, there was always the possibility of eviction (McArdle 1978:159). Of all the inhabitants of Altopascio, sharecroppers living on the holdings of the Medici Grand Dukes were the most likely to live in multiple family units (McArdle 1978:130-132). As land became scarcer, sharecroppers increasingly lived in extended households (McArdle 1978:140). On the farms at Altopascio, sharecropping was well institutionalized and the Medici Grand Dukes were exceptionally powerful landlords. Many of these conditions were found throughout northern and central Italy. Household extension among sharecroppers was associated with landlords' power and a well-institutionalized form of sharecropping.

Scenario 2: Household Structure Unrelated to Landlords' Practices

Although landlords in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries used their power to influence their tenants' household structure, landlords' practices in fifteenth-century Tuscany did not necessarily lead to household extension. Sharecroppers' household structure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may have had its roots in earlier centuries, as there is some evidence that sharecropping households were also large and extended during the earlier period of time (Kertzer 1984:79, 1989:4). However, though household extension was still relatively common in the early centuries, these sharecroppers may have been less likely to live in extended households than their counterparts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Barbagli 1984; Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985; Klapisch and Demonet 1975; McArdle 1978).

Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber (1985:298), using data compiled from the *Catasto* of 1427, a set of fiscal documents, found a relatively high incidence of large and extended households in fifteenth-century Tuscany, although there was little difference between the household structure of sharecroppers and smallholders. They found larger differences in household structure between the settled peasantry (sharecroppers, smallholders, and lessees) and other rural inhabitants (e.g. artisans) than among the different types of peasantry (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:298). In the rural quarter of Santo Spirito in 1427, Herlihy (1985:140) found little difference in the average family size of peasant owners, leaseholders, and sharecroppers; in fact, sharecroppers had a slightly lower average family size (5.84 members for sharecroppers, 5.97 for leaseholders, and 5.91 for peasant owners). Elsewhere, however, Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber argue that land tenure did create differences in demographic practices, not captured by their aggregate analyses (1985:117, 240-244, 296; Klapisch and Demonet 1975; see review in Kertzer 1984:79-80).

Other evidence, though, also suggests that household extension was less widespread during the fifteenth century. Although the percentage of extended households in fifteenth-century Tuscany was relatively high in comparison to other regions of western Europe, it was low in comparison to other sharecropping regions in Italy. For example, in some regions during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the percentage of extended households was more than seventy (Kertzer and Hogan 1989:54), compared to about thirty percent in Tuscany in 1427 (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:298). Some research shows that household extension became more common as sharecropping spread (Barbagli 1984; Poni 1978:226), again suggesting that there were fewer extended households in earlier centuries.

In Tuscany, sharecropping began to spread before 1350 and its expansion continued throughout the fifteenth century (Jones 1968). Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber's data suggest that in 1427, 56.6% of rural families were smallholders (they may have leased additional plots), 18.9% were sharecroppers, and 4.3% were fixed-term lessees (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:115-117). Although it is clear that sharecropping spread throughout Florentine rural domains (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:118-120; Jones 1965, 1968), there is considerable debate over a range of issues (in addition to the prevalence of household extension) about sharecropping in fifteenth-century Tuscany, including the extent of the consolidation of properties, the degree of landlords' involvement in their tenancies, whether landlords merely exploited their tenants or actually provided capital improvements, the variability of landlords' management techniques, and whether the spread of sharecropping was beneficial for rural inhabitants (Cipolla 1949:182; Giorgetti 1974:37; Goldthwaite 1980:49; Herlihy 1965, 1968:264-275; 1981; Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:106-107, 118; Jones 1968:206, 236; Kotelnikova 1974:24-26; Pinto 1982:252-329, 423-24; Romano 1966:594).

Landlords invested in agricultural holdings by providing working capital and by making physical improvements to their properties. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Tuscan landlords, usually Florentines, customarily made loans to share-tenants when they took possession of the farm (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:119). These loans, made by both small and large landowners, were virtually an inseparable condition of share-tenancy (Jones 1968:225; Pinto 1980:307). Loans included cash, cattle, seed, grain, farm implements, clothes, shoes, and food (Jones 1954:177, 1968:225; Kotelnikova 1974:20,22; Mazzi and Raveggi 1983:28, 291-299; Piccinni 1982:56-59). Although these loans undoubtedly tied the tenants to the landlords and increased personal dependence, tenants no doubt welcomed the cash advances and capital improvements (Jones 1956:195, 1968:234-241; Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:118-120; Kotelnikova 1974). There were numerous arrangements for providing livestock (Emigh 1996; Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:118; Imberciadori 1958; Jones 1954:177, 1956:195, 1968:224-225; Kotelnikova 1974:20,23,25; Mirri 1959:555; Niccolini di Camugliano 1925:12; Pinto 1980:300-306).

Many landlords were actively involved in the direct management of their farms. They made capital improvements and consolidated land (Goldthwaite 1968:42-43; Jones 1969:37). Some landlords made physical improvements to their properties, by digging ditches or by building walls and granaries (Jones 1969:37). The introduction of mixed cropping associated with the practice of sharecropping was one way to increase productivity and income (Brown 1989:103-111).

Mixed agriculture provided the landlord with a variety of crops that could be consumed or sold on the market (Brown 1989:104; Jones 1969:37). Some of these crops, such as olive groves and vineyards, required large capital outlays and several years before the crops bore fruit. Urban landlords, not rural inhabitants, were able to finance these investments. Landlords' investments and activities increased agricultural productivity and income.

The consolidation of holdings was central to the process of urban investment. Florentines purchased land in rural regions and consolidated individual plots into larger farms (Brown 1989:103; Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:117-119; Jones 1956:194-196, 1968:224-228). The consolidation of land into *poderi* with farm buildings and a centralized estate often occurred on home or manor farms, former *donicata*, *curie* or granges. Others were combined from customary holdings recovered by manumission or escheat and converted to leasehold (Jones 1968:225-228). Elsewhere, Florentines purchased land from smallholders. Some regions of sharecropping were distinguished by dispersed settlements around a tiny center (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:50; Jones 1968:232). By the fifteenth century, the land in many rural communities was owned primarily by wealthy landlords (Jones 1968:230-231). Sharecroppers were often required by contract to reside on these isolated and compact *poderi* (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:50; Jones 1968:232). Herlihy argued that the concentration of parcels into single, compact, dispersed *poderi* reflected landlords' search for improved productivity. The old system of residents of rural villages working scattered parcels, usually without animals, was a form of subsistence agriculture using little capital investment. The spread of *mezzadria* dispersed inhabitants from nucleated villages onto scattered farms, but maintained an relatively high population density overall. Consolidation could require extensive amounts of investment, especially when it required building dwellings for tenants newly relocated from nucleated villages (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:117; Jones 1968:228). Although there were certainly differences between smallholding and sharecropping in the extent of land consolidation and size of holdings, these differences should not be overdrawn, because consolidation proceeded slowly and unevenly. Even the supposedly compact *poderi* of the large landowners included small plots or scattered holdings (Pinto 1982:258-263) and even near Florence *appoderamento* was far from complete (Jones 1968:234-235).

When Tuscan landlords leased land directly to sharecroppers, they did hold considerable power over their lessees, but for the period of time under consideration here, 1350 to 1500, landlords' ability to increase share-rents or labor services was limited by the competition

for tenants. Both commercial rents and the price of grain fell after the mid-fourteenth century (e.g. at Santa Maria Impruneta: Herlihy 1968:273; at Pistoia: Herlihy 1965:238-239). Because the countryside remained relatively depopulated until 1460 after the plagues of the mid-fourteenth century (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:73), rural inhabitants had some advantages and bargaining power, since landlords' control over tenants was diminished by high rural mobility and the scarcity of tenants. While there is some evidence that landlords could increase their tenants' obligations (Jones 1956:195, 1968:224; Mirri 1959:555), other factors mitigated landlords' abilities to squeeze tenants or increase rents. Changes in tenancy were frequent (Jones 1956:196; Niccolini di Camugliano 1925:16-17). Some land went uncultivated for the lack of tenants (Herlihy 1968:272; Jones 1956:196; Niccolini di Camugliano 1925:16). Flight was common, and some tenants never repayed their loans and abandoned their tenancies in response to the combined burden of rent and debt (Fiumi 1958:494, 1961:130-131; Giorgetti 1974:37; Herlihy 1965:243, 1968:272; Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:119; Imberciadori 1957; Jones 1954:176, 1956:195, 1968:225; Mazzi and Ravaggi 1983:28, 291-299; Niccolini di Camugliano 1925:16; Pinto 1982:252-329, 423-24).

Share-term and fixed-term leases to worker-tenants (lessees who worked the land) were quite similar (Jones 1954:176-177; 1968:223), although share-term leases have been studied more extensively. Both type of lease often had detailed conditions governing tenancy and farm-work that cultivators had to observe (Jones 1954:176-177, 1968:223). Tenants had to reside on the land. They were not allowed to assume other work or leases, or to sublet, alienate, or quit the lease without due notice (Jones 1968:223). Both share-term and fixed-term lessees often had to provide, in addition to the regular rent, additional rents of wood, eggs, and other produce (Jones 1954:176). Other leases stipulated the obligation to "work the land well" (*bene lavorare*), which was elaborated in statutes and leases and included specific rotations, ploughings, dates of sowing and harvest, intensive cultivation by digging and manuring, digging ditches, pruning, and cultivating vines and olives (Jones 1954:176, 1956:194-195; Kotelnikova 1974:20-21; see also Piccinni 1985:152; Pinto 1980:300-306). Tenants were not allowed to cut vines or trees, or to remove hay, straw, or manure (Jones 1968:223). Both fixed-term and share-term leases commonly required the tenant to deliver the produce to the landlord in Florence at the tenant's expense, with the landlord paying the gate tax (*gabella*) (Jones 1956:195). Leases were relatively short-term, lasting between one and five years (Emigh 1997b:429; Jones 1968:220), although they were somewhat longer than in later centuries. There was considerable variability in both

fixed-term and share-term leases (Jones 1968:223). Although there is a debate about the absolute prosperity of share-tenants (Cherubini 1984; Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:120; Kotel'nikova 1974; Mazzi and Raveggi 1983; Piccinni 1982; Pinto 1982), there is little evidence of large differences between the well being of fixed-term and share-term tenants (Jones 1968:225). Herlihy (1968:273-274) suggested that sharecropping spread during the labor shortages of the late-fourteenth century because the rents were lower and because the terms – splitting the risks with the landlord – were more favorable to tenants. As Jones noted, fixed rents in either money or kind (usually grain) were common, and were to some extent, interchangeable on both lay and ecclesiastical estates. Sometimes fixed rents appeared more commonly on lands held as mortgaged securities (Jones 1956:194).

Analyses of leases preserved as notarial documents suggest that terms specifying landlords' investment and involvement were found in both share-term and fixed-term leases to worker-tenants. Such provisions were rarely found in leases to middle-tenants, who leased the land, but then sublet it to another party, who worked the property. Fixed-term leasing to middle-tenants was apparently not accompanied by landlords' involvement or investment. Fixed-term leases to middle-tenants may have been opportunities to profit through financial transactions or to conduct other business matters, not opportunities for income from investment in agriculture (Emigh forthcoming).

Urban landlords' involvement in agriculture was shaped by the political economy of Florence, a center of urban manufacturing. Florentines were absentee landlords, whose primary occupations revolved around urban manufacturing or banking, not agriculture. Analyses of leases show that landlords used sharecropping to decrease costs associated with supervising labor and managing their physical properties, especially with the commonly grown Tuscan crops of olives and grapes, which required extensive capital outlays that could be easily damaged by mismanagement and which necessitated extensive hand labor (Emigh 1997b).

Landlords and Tenants in Two Mugellan Parishes

To further investigate the relationship between household structure and sharecropping, I present some evidence from several small parishes of sharecroppers in fifteenth-century Tuscany to examine their household structure and the practices of their landlords. I examine the percentage of extended households in these communities and then I analyze some documents to illustrate some of the practices of landlords.

The choice of the communities is crucial. In fifteenth-century Tuscany, there were three tenurial forms: sharecropping, fixed-term leasing, and smallholding. There was also a distinction between asymmetrical leasing, where Florentine landowners leased large holdings to rural inhabitants for cultivation, and regions of smallholding mixed with reciprocal leasing, where rural inhabitants leased small plots of land to their neighbors in response to the local system of stratification or the family life-cycle (Emigh 1993). As examples of regions where asymmetrical sharecropping was common, I chose two parishes, San Piero a Sieve and Santa Maria a Spugnoles, in the Mugello, north of Florence. In these parishes, Florentines had purchased property, consolidated land, and let the land to sharecroppers. Although there were some remaining smallholders, these parishes were primarily characterized by asymmetrical sharecropping. These parishes had been part of the Florentine *contado*, the rural region under Florentine jurisdiction, for many centuries and had been transformed by the penetration of the Florentine market economy. The Mugello had fertile land and was generally a prosperous region (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:51).

The *Catasto* is a set of fiscal documents redacted between 1427-1430 to assess taxes. It has been described and analyzed in detail by Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber (1985) and Conti (1965a, 1965b). Because taxation was partially based on the number of individuals in the household, the *Catasto* contains a relatively complete census of the Tuscan population. Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber (1981) created a machine-readable data set containing most of the demographic information. Using these data,⁵ I calculated the percentage of households with more than one nuclear family (either married parents and offspring coresiding or married brothers coresiding) for households in the parishes of San Piero a Sieve and Santa Maria a Spugnoles. The percentage of extended families in these parishes was 19.1. This percentage is smaller than the average percentage of extended households among rural Tuscans in 1427. Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber (1985:298) found that 31.2 percent of sharecroppers, 30.2 percent of smallholders, and 28.6 percent of fixed-term lessees lived in extended households. Thus, the extent of extended household structure in San Piero a Sieve and Santa Maria a Spugnoles was relatively low for this period of time.

Below, I use documentary evidence to consider the nature of sharecropping and landlords' power and practices in these parishes. This evidence suggests that some of the practices of these fifteenth-century landlords were similar to landlords' practices in later centuries. Landlords in San Piero a Sieve and Santa Maria a Spugnoles were involved in their properties; they managed farms carefully and provided capital inputs. In these parishes, the size of the tenant

household was considered in relation to the characteristics of the farms. The documentary evidence also suggests that, as in the later centuries, tenants in these parishes were kept in short-term relationships that often lasted a long time. In other respects, however, the nature of sharecropping and landlords' practices were different in the two time periods. During the fifteenth century, land consolidation was still in progress; before farms were fixed in space, landlords could rearrange parcels of land for any given family size. As a consequence, families were not required to adjust household size to farm size, and were under less pressure to create extended households. In addition, in the fifteenth century, landlords had much less power over their tenants than in later centuries. Rural depopulation, the presence of smallholding, and a less institutionalized form of sharecropping decreased landlords' power. These differences may explain why household extension was less prevalent during the fifteenth century in these parishes and throughout rural Tuscany.

Two sets of documents illustrate these points. *Catasto* declarations show that capital inputs to farms were widespread and that not all the sharecropped farms were consolidated into contiguous properties. In addition, I examine personal correspondence from the family of Cosimo and Lorenzo di Giovanni de' Medici to consider some of their management practices. In the parishes of San Piero a Sieve and Santa Maria a Spugnole, the Medici family owned numerous holdings and hired a manager (*fattore*), Matteo di ser Giovanni, to supervise the farms. Although these letters illustrate the practices of a single landlord, other Tuscan landlords undoubtedly used these techniques.⁶

Like landlords in later centuries, these letters show that the Medici were interested, involved landlords.⁷ Letters written by the manager of these farms, Matteo di ser Giovanni, to various members of the Medici family, provide many details about the management of their farms. These letters indicate that the farms were supervised with extreme care. The letters describe plans for working the farms and for transporting and selling grain at local and Florentine markets. The Medici arranged for capital improvements to their properties and relied on the farms for produce. They knew their tenants and were personally involved with their affairs. For example, on March 11, 1438⁸, Matteo wrote a detailed letter to Cosimo di Giovanni de' Medici at Ferrara about the affairs of the farms. He told Cosimo about settling the accounts with the workers, the sale of grain, the poor weather, the state of the orchards and the person who tended them, the vineyards, the figs that were drying, digging ditches, and the health of the workers (*Mediceo avanti il principato* (MAP), filza V, numero (no.) 645). On July 24, 1440, Matteo reported to Cosimo and Lorenzo more details about the weather and compared some of the farms' current yields to those of the previous year. At Ponzano, the

worker had been sick and the harvest was not good (MAP, filza XIII, no. 42). In a letter of March 23, 1440, Matteo reviewed a detailed plan that he had made with Lorenzo de' Medici to make wine and to fill casks. Lorenzo had proposed a plan that made little sense to Matteo, who asked him to reconsider. Matteo also reported on arrangements for transporting wheat, how the carriers had been negligent, a shipment of wheat to the officials of the *Monte*, and the sale of some wheat in Scarperia in the previous November (MAP, filza XX, no. 74). In a letter of April 9, 1440, Matteo again described arrangements for tasting and transporting wine (MAP, filza XX, no. 82). In another letter, Matteo mentioned settling the worker's accounts (MAP, filza XX, no. 623; see also filza XX, no. 74). In a letter to Giovanni di Cosimo on January 2, 1446, Matteo reported that some workers wanted to move from their farms because they were unhappy about the tax assessment they received in their current location. Matteo urged Giovanni to try to make a suitable arrangement for these workers. The farms would improve, Matteo assured Giovanni, if the tenants worked more willingly (MAP, filza V, no. 546). In a letter of March 12, 1440, Matteo also reported that one of the workers had torn down a wall and rebuilt it on the other side of a recently purchased piece of land (MAP, filza XX, no. 623). In another letter of March 24, 1432, Matteo reported on the work a mason was doing for them, including building a granary (MAP, filza XX, no. 31). Thus, not only were the Medici closely involved with their farms, they made capital improvements.

Matteo also wrote the *Portata* declarations, the original versions of the *Catasto* of 1427, for several residents of Santa Maria a Spugnole, including Meo di Michele (*Archivio del Catasto* (AC) [volume] 142, folio (f.) 567r),⁹ Stefano di Lotto (AC 142, f. 568r),¹⁰ Antonio di Nanni Comandi (AC 142, f. 554r) and Lapino di Azzino (AC 142, f. 569r).¹¹ The declarations of Stefano di Lotto and Lapino di Azzino clearly indicate that they were sharecroppers for Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici, and I was able to match both of these to farms in Giovanni di Bicci's *Catasto*.¹² The Medici also arranged other affairs for their workers: in 1428, a Florentine notary wrote a document excusing Nanni di Paolo, probably a Medici tenant, from the imposition of the head tax in the *Catasto*. The document was kept as part of the Medici family records (MAP, filza XCIV, no. 183).

I do not have letters from other landlords in the area, but other evidence suggests that the Medici were typical landlords. The countryside remained relatively depopulated until 1460 (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:73). As a result, tenants were scarce in the 1430s, and landlords must have competed with each other to provide tenants with favorable leases. Furthermore, *Catasto* declarations from this region reveal that most landlords provided a loan (*prestanza*)

to their tenants, either in cash, in animals, or both (Emigh 1996). For example, Iacopo di Tura, a resident of Santa Maria a Spugnole, sharecropped a farm of Averardo di Francesco de' Medici. Averardo provided a *prestanza* of 45 florins, 22 *staia* of grain, 4 *staia* of *biada*, a pair of oxen valued at 28 florins and 2 *lire*, and 18 *lire* for other expenses for maintaining the properties (AC 60, f. 85v (*Portata*)). Luca di Cola, another resident of Santa Maria a Spugnole, sharecropped a farm of Costanza di Rosso Cavalcanti, who provided a *prestanza* of 21 florins, a pair of oxen valued at 18.5 florins, in addition to sheep, goats, and pigs (AC 38, f. 342r (*Portata*)).

The correspondence between the Medici and their manager also suggests that some tenants had long-term associations with the Medici, even though these relationships were constantly renegotiated. In 1427, Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici's *Catasto* states that Nanni d'Orso was a worker on a farm in San Bartolo a Gagliano (*Monte Comune o delle Graticole, Copie del Catasto* 75, f. 675v (*Campione*) and AC 49, f. 1152v, (*Portata*)). Thirteen years later, in a letter of March 23, 1440, Matteo reported that Nanni d'Orso sold some grain (MAP, filza XX, no. 74), and in a letter of November 15, 1440, Matteo reported that Nanni d'Orso had been involved in a different transaction involving wheat (MAP, filza XI, no. 455). Several letters mention Nanni di Pierozzo. On March 24, 1432, he brought one of Matteo's letters to the Medici (MAP, filza XX, no. 31). On January 24, 1438, Nanni di Pierozzo wrote a letter to Cosimo in his own hand giving the details about the sale of farms goods and the fate of some other tenants who apparently died of the plague. Nanni di Pierozzo told Cosimo that they would plant the *biade* when there was a break from the rain and snow (MAP, filza XI, no. 110). Nanni di Pierozzo may be the son of Pierozzo di Neri, who, according to Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici's 1427 *Catasto*, sharecropped a farm in Santa Maria a Spugnole.¹³ On March 23, 1440, Pierozzo was a messenger for Matteo di ser Giovanni (MAP, filza XX, no. 74). Thus, there are numerous references to tenants who were associated with the Medici for a long period of time. In addition, however, the letters also suggest that the Medici could easily dismiss their tenants. A letter of January 21, 1441 suggests that leases were oral and were renegotiated each year (MAP, filza XI, no. 348). In this respect, the Medici were more similar to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century landlords who gave annual leases than to other fifteenth-century landlords who often gave five year leases (Emigh 1997b:429; Jones 1968:220).

With these documents, it is easier to find the tenants who stayed for a long time than those who were quickly dismissed, since recurrent names are easier to trace; nevertheless, the point is not to argue for a numerical predominance of long-term relationships, but rather to illustrate that this was a possibility. In contrast to this long-

term possibility was the immediate reality that leases were renegotiated each year, creating the opportunity for the landlords to dismiss the tenants. Effectively, these tenants stayed in "long-term" temporary relationships. Even if the tenants formed lasting relationships with the Medici and their manager, there was no guarantee that these relationships would last. The Medici could end the association at any time, if they were displeased with tenants or if a newcomer to the parish proved to be a more diligent worker.

As in the later centuries, the landlords in the parishes of Santa Maria a Spugnole and San Piero a Sieve were cognizant of their tenants' domestic situations and tried to match the size of the farm to the family. They considered these domestic situations when making decisions about leasing their properties. Matteo's letters to the Medici illustrate that they tried to find farms that were suited to the families. A letter written by Matteo on November 22, 1459 shows how he mediated between the Medici and their tenants. Matteo sent one of the workers, Berna, to Florence with some wine for Cosimo and Piero de' Medici to taste along with his letter, which explained Berna's situation, so that Giovanni di Cosimo would be able to decide which farm to lease to him. Berna and his family had a farm at Cafaggiolo, but the Medici had asked that he be transferred to Fiesole. Berna indicated that he wanted to stay at Cafaggiolo, and Matteo proposed a compromise: Berna would come to Fiesole for eight days to prune and sow. Matteo indicated that Berna had been a diligent worker. Berna's domestic situation was explicitly considered, both in the context of the inconvenience of his moving when his wife had several small children and in relation to the suitability of the farm to his family. Near the end of the letter, Matteo again admonished Giovanni to consider what to do in the context of the entire family (MAP, filza VI, no. 415). In a letter to Cosimo and Lorenzo from Trebbio on December 26, 1438, Matteo relayed detailed information about the rental of some of the farms for the upcoming year. One of their workers, Marco di Domenico, brought the letter from Trebbio to Florence. Matteo reported that he had encouraged Marco to retain a lease for two other properties in addition to renting the Medici farm at Cupo. One of the other landlords, Niccolò Valori, may have required a written lease, as Matteo reported that Marco was going to Florence to arrange the contract. Marco had told Matteo that he needed a loan of 15 florins for one of his landlords, and another loan in the amount of 7 florins for the other landlord, as well 24 *staia* of grain, to assume the rental of the Medici farm at Cupo. Matteo recommended that Cosimo and Lorenzo make this loan to Marco, adding that they would not be able to arrange a better rental (MAP, filza XIII, no. 3). Again, Marco and his brother's domestic situations were explicitly considered with respect to the arrangements: Matteo

told Cosimo and Lorenzo that although the two brothers were not married, Marco had three children above the age of ten and intended to marry.

In a letter of January 21, 1441, Matteo discussed his arrangements for renting the farms near Trebbio, in the parish of Santa Maria a Spugnole. Matteo acknowledged the domestic situation of Cecco and his son, Berna, in discussing which farms to rent to them, noting that they liked to live near each other, but that one house was not enough for both of them. He also discussed at length which farm to give to one of the tenants, Giovanni di Nino. Cosimo had not been entirely pleased with his work (MAP, filza XI, no. 348). According to the *Catasto* declaration of Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici in 1427, Nino di Giovanni and his sons, Giovanni and Meo, were tenants in Santa Maria a Spugnole (*Monte Comune o delle Graticole, Copie del Catasto* 75, f. 670v (*Campione*) and AC 49, f. 1145v, (*Portata*)). In 1427, Nino declared his age to be 80 and declared his son, Giovanni, to be 46 (AC 177, f. 527v (*Campione*) and AC 330bis, f. 176v). In 1440, Giovanni would have been about 58 years old. Like some of the other Medici tenants, the declaration of Nino di Giovanni is found in the *Aggiunte*, in volume 330bis of the *Archivio del Catasto*,¹⁴ indicating that the members of this family were newcomers to the parish. Unlike most of the declarations of the families who had lived in the *contado* for a number of years, Nino di Giovanni's declaration did not have the value of the previous *estimo*, another indication that this family had recently moved to the parish. In a letter of March 12, 1440, Matteo again told Cosimo and Lorenzo that he moved some of the workers to other locations (MAP, filza XX, no. 623). These letters suggest that Cosimo and Lorenzo di Giovanni de' Medici and their manager, Matteo, moved the tenants between farms to match an existing family and their domestic situation to a farm. In this respect, these fifteenth-century landlords were similar to their eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century counterparts. Despite this similarity, however, these practices did not create as many extended households in the fifteenth century as in later centuries. Fifteenth-century landlords may have relied more on moving tenants between farms than on tenants' adoption of a particular household structure.

A crucial difference between the two time periods was that fifteenth-century farms were not fixed in space. As the historical literature also indicates, land consolidation was still in progress in the fifteenth century. Careful analysis of the *Catasto* declarations suggests that *poderi* were not always comprised of adjacent pieces of land. The *Campione* versions of the *Catasto* often list properties as *poderi* without giving detailed descriptions of the boundaries. For example, the *Campione* declaration of Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici lists numerous *poderi*, "containing pieces of land with confines as indicated in the

Portata" (*Monte Comune o delle Graticole, Copie del Catasto* 75, ff. 668r-681r; listings of the property in the Mugello start on f. 670r). In the *Portata*, the same farms are described in more detail, sometimes indicating that the farm was comprised of separate pieces of land, giving the size of the property, or providing some of the boundaries of the individual plots (AC 49, ff. 1140r-1200r; listings of the property in the Mugello start on f. 1144v). Other declarations also show that identical pieces of property were often described in more detail in the *Portate* than in the *Campioni*.¹⁵ Even the descriptions of land in the *Portata* declarations may be summaries: Farms with scattered pieces of land may have been described as *poderi* for ease of presentation.

A Mugellan land sale illustrates how the descriptions of properties became condensed. In the *Catasto* of 1427, Federigo di Francesco declared two "*posizioni*" in the parish of Santa Maria a Spugnole, one of which was located at Rabatta. Three specific *confini* are given in the *Campione*, in addition to a general reference to other boundaries. In the *Portata*, the property is called a *podere* (AC 75, ff. 282r (*Campione*), AC 40, f. 696r (*Portata*)). On the sixth of November, 1427, Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici purchased property, located in Santa Maria a Spugnole at Rabatta, from Federigo di Francesco. It is likely that the farm in Federigo's *Catasto* is the one that was sold to Giovanni in this transaction. Although the farm is called a *podere* in the *Catasto*, in the notarial document recording the sale of the property, more than twenty separate pieces of land are listed (*Notarile antecosimiano* (NA) volume (vol.) 682, ff. 305v-308r). If the properties are identical, this provides a clear example of how *Catasto* declarations were summarized even in the *Portata*. Even if the properties were not identical, the notarial document illustrates the high degree of land fragmentation in relatively small regions; and in particular, the relatively large number of different landowners listed in the *confini* suggests that many of these pieces of land comprising *poderi* were not contiguous.

The letters written by the *fattore* of the Medici, Matteo di ser Giovanni, to the Medici are again instructive. In a letter of October 28, 1444, Matteo told Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici about trying to arrange the purchase of a vineyard. The Medici had purchased a *podere* that did not have a vineyard and Matteo indicated that it was necessary to buy one for the farm. He urged Giovanni to make the arrangements quickly, before someone else could intervene and buy a house that was also entailed in the deal (MAP, filza V, no. 536). This letter provides an example of *appoderamento*, the process by which urban residents purchased plots of land and consolidated them into larger units. The letter also illustrates that during this period of time farms were flexible units, not fixed ones, because landlords were still in the process of buying plots of land and recombining them into larger units.

Giovanni di Bicci's purchase of land from Federigo di Francesco was only one of his many purchases in the Mugello. Cosimo and Lorenzo, the sons of Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici, bought land in the Mugello throughout the mid-fifteenth century. For example, in 1444, Simone di Giovanni sold several pieces of land in San Piero a Sieve in two separate transactions to the Medici for 14 florins (NA, vol. 689, f. 324v; vol. 676, ff. 311v-313r). In 1446, he sold land in San Piero a Sieve to Cosimo for 30 florins (NA, vol. 689, ff. 116r-v). In 1464, Simone's widow, Piera, sold land in a neighboring parish to Cosimo for 377 florins (NA, vol. 735, ff. 315r-316r). In 1439, Costanza, the widow of Rosso Cavalcanti, sold Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici another farm in Santa Maria a Spugnole, for 200 florins (NA, vol. 686, ff. 294r-296v). The Medici bought land throughout the Mugello from other Florentines, entities, and local residents (NA, vol. 688, ff. 321r-322v (1444); vol. 688, ff. 347r-v (1444); vol. 7936, f. 75r (1410); vol. 9276, ff. 188v-189r (1455); vol. 11059, n.p. (1397); vol. 1170, f. 59v (1412); vol. 676, ff. 309-311r (1444); vol. 7939, ff. 75r-76r (1410)). Matteo di ser Giovanni actively searched for properties for the Medici to purchase. In a letter of September 22, 1457, Matteo wrote that he was finally able to purchase a farm from a person named Piero, and indicated that he would try to arrange for the transfer of the ownership, so that he would not have to pay another tax on it. It is not clear whether Matteo purchased it for himself or as an agent for the Medici (MAP, filza IX, no. 316).¹⁶ Thus, in the fifteenth century, even in parishes already partially transformed by the Florentine market, the process of land consolidation was far from complete.

The numerous purchases of land by the Medici illustrate the process of *appoderamento* and show how landlords had ample opportunities to reorganize and recombine existing farms into different combinations of individual plots. The evidence from the *Catasto* declarations and the letters illustrate that in the early-fifteenth century, this region – already heavily influenced by the penetration of urban capital – was not characterized by completely consolidated holdings. Because farms were not fixed geographically and landlords were continually rearranging plots of land, landlords may have relied less on tenants' household extension. The size and composition of the farms themselves were flexible and could be rearranged to match an existing family size and structure. Where consolidation was not complete, landlords had greater incentives to rearrange holdings, making it easier to split and recombine farms to suit a family's current size. Thus, the extent and degree of consolidation was an important influence on household structure.

Appoderamento was also related to landlords' power over their tenants. In later centuries, when farms were organized into *fattorie*, sharecropping was more firmly institutionalized and landlords were

able to control more aspects of agricultural production and family life. Depopulation also sharply reduced landlords' power over their tenants in the fifteenth century. In sharp contrast to the nineteenth century, when demographic growth created competition among tenants for farms, depopulation in the fifteenth century created a shortage of rural tenants. Matteo's letters suggest that tenants, especially good ones, were difficult to find. In the letter of December 26, 1438 discussed above, Matteo di ser Giovanni suggested renting a farm because it was not possible to find a better tenant at that time. This tenant required a sizable loan from the Medici to assume the tenancy (MAP, filza XIII, no. 3). Matteo also complained about the difficulty of finding honest tenants. On July 24, 1440, he wrote to Cosimo and Lorenzo explaining that he tried not to be deceived by the tenants, but he could not be everywhere at once. The best solution, he assured them, was to have dealings with good people (MAP, filza XIII, no. 42).¹⁷ Many Tuscan tenants never repayed their debts (Giorgetti 1974:37; Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:106-107, 119-120; Pinto 1982:252-329, 423-424). These Mugellian *Catasto* declarations also have references to tenants who left farms without repaying their debts, again suggesting that repayment could be avoided.¹⁸ In these parishes, as elsewhere in rural Tuscany where there were labor shortages, tenants gained some advantages from rural depopulation. Rural mobility was high and tenants were scarce, because of the relative depopulation of the countryside during this time period (Herlihy 1968:272; Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985:73). The scarcity of tenants also decreased landlords' power and may have decreased landlords' ability to require particular demographic practices, including extended household formation.

Conclusions

The analyses of documents from the parishes of Santa Maria a Spugnole and San Piero a Sieve illustrate that landlords in these parishes were involved in their tenancies and, thus, did influence economic production. Landlords carefully controlled the production process and provided capital inputs for the farms. Some landlords matched tenants to appropriate farms, taking into account the size of the family. These letters also suggest that tenants were held in short-term relationships that, paradoxically, often lasted a long time. In addition, however, since farms were still being consolidated, landlords were able to rearrange plots of land, and, as a consequence, were less reliant on tenants' adoption of household extension. These documents also suggest that sharecropping was less institutionalized during this period of time and that landlords' power was diminished by rural depopulation. These findings may account for the relatively

low incidence of household extension among sharecroppers in the parishes of Santa Maria a Spugnole and San Piero a Sieve.

Using this documentary evidence, along with the historical literature about fifteenth-century Tuscany, sharecropping during this earlier period of time can be compared to sharecropping in northern and central Italy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the fifteenth century, rural depopulation and the resulting shortage of tenants decreased landlords' power. In later centuries, population growth increased the competition for farms, which increased landlords' power over their tenants. Landlords in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had more power to demand particular demographic practices. In addition, sharecropping was more firmly institutionalized during the later period of time. Some fifteenth-century landlords hired managers and consolidated their holdings, but the *fattoria* system was not well established. Landlords were still consolidating farms by purchasing plots of land from smallholders and by reorganizing their holdings. During the later centuries, consolidation was largely complete, farms were fixed geographically, and *fattorie* were established. Landlords' purchases of property eliminated smallholding and increased tenants' reliance on sharecropping. Families were forced to adapt to pre-existing farms. This highly institutionalized form of sharecropping reinforced landlords' power, by increasing tenants' reliance on the landlords' facilities and their loans. Although fifteenth-century landlords, as well as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ones, moved tenants between farms, in the fifteenth century, landlords also rearranged the physical boundaries of their holdings to match a given family size. Household extension may have been more widespread in the later centuries, because tenants had fewer options when sharecropping was more firmly institutionalized and when farms were fixed in space. In addition, landlords had more power to demand household extension.

Of course, mortality was higher in the fifteenth century than in later centuries, and higher mortality may have decreased the incidence of household extension during the earlier period of time (Ruggles 1987). The evidence presented here cannot account for the effects of mortality on household extension. However, as Kertzer (1991:172) argued, I suggest that mortality cannot explain all of the variation in household structure. First, it is unlikely that differences in mortality alone can explain why household extension was lower in the sharecropping parishes of Santa Maria a Spugnole and San Piero a Sieve than elsewhere in fifteenth-century Tuscany. Second, demographic explanations cannot explain why household extension was prevalent in fifteenth-century Tuscany despite high mortality. Finally, the evidence presented here illustrates that landlords' practices and the nature of sharecropping did have an effect on household extension among sharecroppers.

Sharecropping plays a central role in the debate over historical household structure because share-tenants' households were often large and extended (Kertzer 1991). Studies of sharecroppers, therefore, illustrate that the nuclear family was not always the most prevalent form of historical household structure, as Laslett argued (1965, 1972), and that high mortality did not necessarily eliminate the possibility of extended household structure, as Levy argued (1965). Analyses of sharecroppers' household structure are also important for economic explanations of the relation between property rights and demographic practices. Because both landlords and tenants had a right to a share of the yield, classic economic and Marxist theories considered sharecropping to be particularly labor intensive. Household extension among sharecroppers is often analyzed as a labor strategy to provide workers for labor intensive agricultural production.

This article contributes to these debates over household structure, sharecropping, and the effects of property rights by comparing the patterns of household extension among sharecroppers in two different time periods. In particular, this evidence suggested that the emphasis on property rights may be misplaced because the same property right, the right to a share of the yield, can be associated with different patterns of household extension. Other factors, especially landlords' practices, have important influences on household structure. First, where landlords are powerful and can demand particular demographic practices, there may be direct links between economic production and demographic reproduction. In particular, landlords of share-tenancies may be able to demand household extension. Large, extended households often increase landlords' returns to their properties, because such households provide a stable labor force and because landlords' income is often maximized by this type of household structure. Second, landlords may be involved in their tenancies and control the production process, but their management techniques may not make use of tenants' demographic practices. Under these conditions, there will be little relation between land tenure and tenants' demographic practices, and, more specifically, household extension may not be widespread among sharecroppers.

The historical literature reviewed in this article suggests that landlords of the first type predominated in northern and central Italy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sharecropping was firmly institutionalized and landlords held considerable power over their tenants. Sharecroppers responded to landlords' income demands and frequently lived in large, extended families. In fifteenth-century Tuscany, however, the second scenario was found. Although landlords were involved in agricultural production, household extension was not as widespread. The historical and documentary evidence presented above shows that during the earlier period of time, sharecropping was

less institutionalized and landlords had less power over their tenants. These conditions diminished landlords' impact on their tenants' living arrangements. These findings resolve the paradox of the relatively low incidence of household extension among fifteenth-century Tuscan sharecroppers in comparison to sharecroppers in other regions and times.

These findings build on historians' previous work that examines the institutionalized form of sharecropping, not just the property right (Poni 1978:203; Silverman 1975:46), by showing how differences in the form of sharecropping and landlords' practices affect household extension. This article builds on suggestions that landlords' power has an important influence on sharecroppers' living arrangements (Cohen and Galassi 1990:646-647; Kertzer 1991:160), by showing how differences in landlords' power affect household structure. Thus, these results help to specify sharecropping's role in larger debates about historic forms of household structure. While these findings confirm that the existence of large, extended households among sharecroppers contradicts Laslett's argument (1965, 1972) that the nuclear family was the most common form of pre-industrial household formation, they also show that sharecropping was not always associated with a single type of household structure. Thus, my analyses are consistent with the recent sociological tradition showing that household structure is not necessarily a result of "modernity", but is instead shaped by local social and economic influences in particular historical contexts. These findings may have implications for the many other contemporary and historical contexts in which sharecropping is found (Aymard 1982; Bhaduri 1973; Byres 1983; Cheung 1969; Chirot 1976; Finkler 1978; Jonsson 1992; Keegan 1983; Lampland 1995; Lehmann 1986; Mann 1990; Morooka and Hayami 1989; Nee and Young 1991; Reid 1976; Robertson 1980; Roumasset 1976; Royce 1993; Swain 1985; Wells 1996; Yoon 1975).

In addition, my results have implications for sociological and demographic debates over the effects of property rights, which are much broader than the debates over historic household structure. The effects of property rights are central to literature discussing the impact of the extent of land ownership and the form of land tenure on demographic outcomes, the growth of market economies and privatization in China and post-communist Eastern and Central Europe, and the transition from feudalism to capitalism (Brenner 1985; Clay and Johnson 1992; Dobb 1947; Hilton 1978; Kornai 1990; Laidig, Schutjer, and Stokes 1981; Lipton and Sachs 1990; Lu and Selden 1987; Nee 1996; Stark 1996; Szelényi 1998). This article suggests that the form of the property right does not necessarily predict demographic or economic outcomes. Instead, my findings show that the way in which property rights are institutionalized and

the degree of actors' power may be more important than the form of the property right, and should be considered in research that discusses the effect of property rights on social, economic, and demographic outcomes.

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Notes

¹ The opposite argument also can be made, that high mortality increased the prevalence of household extension because individuals whose immediate family members had died often joined existing nuclear families composed of more distant relatives (McArdle 1978:139-140).

² Where inheritance is partible, sharecropping also differs from smallholding because partible inheritance makes smallholder's holdings divisible, while sharecropping is an impartible form of land tenure. Sharecropping's effect on labor practices and its effect as an impartible tenancy may increase the likelihood of household extension among share-tenants (Emigh 1997a).

³ There is an important distinction between sharecropping as a class relation and sharecropping as a demographic strategy (Lehmann 1986; Robertson 1980; Silverman 1975; Yoon 1975). In some contexts, sharecropping is "asymmetrical", that is, landlords and tenants belong to different social classes and mobility between the two classes is rare. In other contexts, sharecropping is "reciprocal", that is, landlords and tenants belong to the same social class, and individuals are either landlords or tenants depending on the demographic characteristics of the head of the household, including age, marital status, and number of surviving children. In reciprocal forms of sharecropping, landlords will have little influence on the demographic practices of their tenants.

⁴ In practice, measurement issues make it difficult to determine household structure. First, households can be described in different ways in different documents. Several nuclear families may be declared as an extended household for fiscal purposes, but listed as separate households for other purposes (or vice versa). Second, physical dwelling spaces compound the

difficulties of identification: Should related, nuclear families residing in adjacent buildings be classified as living together or separately? Although the determining factor may be whether family members shared common meals, evidence of this type is rarely found in historical documents (e.g. McArdle 1978:149). Finally, studies measure the extent of household structure differently, so it is difficult to make strict comparisons between them. Some studies present the percentage of individuals living in different types of households, while others use the percentage of household types in a community. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that these measurement issues could undermine the central finding of these studies, that sharecroppers in northern and central Italy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries lived in large, extended households, because this type of household was so widespread and because such measurement problems are common to all studies of household structure, not just the ones of this region.⁵

After reviewing the original *Catasto* declarations, I made a few minor modifications to Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber's data. I used these sources: *Archivio del Catasto* (AC) [volume] 177 (*Campione*), AC 122 (*Portata*) (Santa Maria a Spugnoles); AC 321 (*Campione*), AC 144 (*Portata*) (San Piero a Sieve); and AC 330bis (*Aggiunte*) (Santa Maria a Spugnoles and San Piero a Sieve).⁶ Most of Matteo's letters to the Medici were written after the redaction of the *Catasto* of 1427 and may reflect practices of a somewhat later period of time.⁷ In 1448, the Medici had loaned to their 121 tenants in the Mugello cash and animals valued at over 4700 florin

(Jones 1968:225).⁸ The Florentine year began on March 25, so I converted all of the dates given in this article to the modern style. In the archival documents, dates between January 1 and March 24 are one year behind the modern date.⁹ I can find no evidence that Meo di Michele was a Medici tenant. The *Catasto* declaration of Meo lists a small piece of property that he worked himself. Meo declared his age to be 30 in 1427 and he lived with his wife, Maddalena, who was 18. He also listed two mules (AC 177, f. 507v (*Campione*)). Was he a day laborer

for the Medici?¹⁰ Indirectly, the *Catasto* declarations provide another type of evidence relating to household structure. Agnozzo di Lotto (AC 177, ff. 517v-518v (*Campione*) and AC 142, ff. 605r-606r (*Portata*)) and Stefano di Lotto (AC 177, f. 508r (*Campione*), and AC 142, f. 568r (*Portata*)) were brothers who lived in separate households. Agnozzo lived in an extended household with two of their other brothers, Cambio and Lapo. Stefano and two of his sons, Piero and Lotto, were sharecroppers of Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici and had no land of their own. The *Portata* version of their *Catasto* declaration, in the handwriting of Matteo di ser Giovanni, explicitly states that they worked one of Giovanni's farms. Agnozzo, Cambio, and Lapo owned and worked three of their own pieces of land and sharecropped land of Costanza the widow of Berto Cavalcanti and Costanza the widow of Rosso Cavalcanti. This raises questions about how the family was separated into two households. Was Stefano the only brother to leave the household because of the possibility of obtaining a lease

from the Medici?¹¹ The *Portata* declarations do not explicitly state that Matteo wrote them, but the handwriting is clearly the same as the signed letters from Matteo to the Medici family. These *Portate* are written in the third

person singular.¹² For the farm of Lapino di Azzino, see *Monte Comune o delle Graticole, Copie del Catasto* 75, f. 671r (*Campione*) and AC 49, f. 145v (*Portata*). For the farm of Stefano di Lotto, see *Monte Comune o delle Graticole, Copie del Catasto* 75, f. 670r (*Campione*) and AC 49,

¹³ If the tenant Berna, discussed in the letter of January 21, 1441 (MAP, filza XI, no. 348), and in the letter of November 22, 1459 (MAP, filza VI, no. 415) are the same person, this is another example of an association that lasted a long time.

¹⁴ In the data set of Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber (1981), eight families are listed as living in the parish of Santa Maria a Spugnole, whose *Campioni* are found in the volume of *Aggiunte*, 330bis. The names of the heads of the households are: Agostino di Antonio, Francesco di Iacopo Delromagne, Pierozzo di Neri, Iacopo di Romagnetto, Nino di Giovanni, Salvi di Bartolo, Cecco di Nencio, and Berto di Bartolo. Berto di Bartolo, however, probably lived in San Michele a Montecuccoli. In addition, two other *Aggiunte*, those of Benedetto di Grazino and Nanni di Piero, suggest that these families lived in the parish of Santa Maria a Spugnole, even though Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber coded them elsewhere. Of these nine *Aggiunte* in Santa Maria a Spugnole, four were tenants of Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici, including Pierozzo di Neri, Iacopo di Romagnetto, Nino di Giovanni, and Cecco di Nencio (see the *Catasto* of Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici, *Monte Comune o delle Graticole*, *Copie del Catasto*, 75, ff. 670v-671v (*Campione*) and AC, 49, ff. 1145r-1146v (*Portata*)). Benedetto di Grazino and Nanni di Piero were tenants of Averardo di Francesco de' Medici (AC 81, f. 453r (*Campione*) and AC 60, ff. 85v-86r (*Portata*)). The remaining three *Aggiunte* were those of Agostino di Antonio, Francesco di Iacopo Delromagne, and Salvi di Bartolo, who declared no assets on their *Catasti*. I was not able to match them to any farms in the region. Of course, they may have been tenants on farms that I cannot identify or they may have been day laborers. Alternatively, they may have had little or no income.

¹⁵ For example, in all the following *Catasto* declarations, property in the Mugello is described in more detail, listing individual pieces of land comprising a *podere*, in the *Portate* than in the *Campioni*: Giovanni d'Andrea di messer Allamanno de' Medici (AC 79, ff. 255v-258r (*Campione*), AC 53, ff. 994r-995v (*Portata*)), Tommaso di Francesco de' Medici (AC 79, ff. 565r-567r (*Campione*), AC 55, ff. 887r-889v (*Portata*)), Nanni di Bardo (AC 79, f. 539r (*Campione*), AC 55, ff. 527r-v (*Portata*)), Gostanza donna fu di Berto Cavalcanti (AC 79, ff. 459-460r (*Campione*), AC 53, ff. 1130r-1131v (*Portata*)), and Giovenco d'Antonio de' Medici (AC 81, ff. 115r-117v (*Campione*), AC 61, ff. 841r-844r (*Portata*)).

¹⁶ Although Matteo says explicitly, "the farm is mine", he often purchased properties for the Medici in his name, acting as their agent.

¹⁷ Of course, Matteo's comments about being deceived may reflect his own attempts to convince the Medici that he was properly supervising the tenants.

¹⁸ See for example, the *Portate* of Cante di Rustico Chavalcanti (AC 53, f. 632r) and Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici (AC 49, f. 1146v).

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