CHAPTER SIX

LAND

Patrician Acquisition

That land ownership passed from small cultivators to urban proprietors is commonplace in studies of Tuscany, Lombardy, and other regions. By consensus, accumulation by the urban well-to-do was already advanced by the early Quattrocento—in 1427 Florentines controlled two-thirds of the land value of their contado, and contadini only 18 percent—and accelerated over the course of the century. Scholarly commentary on the decline of peasant ownership ranges from the coolly analytical to the scathing, and the transition has been characterized, variously, as “erosion” “expropriation,” and “proletarianization.” But divergent interpretation takes place within agreement about overall trends, and study of tax records and notarial instruments by a small army of scholars puts the matter beyond contention. Veneto studies support the thesis of patrician accumulation, and examination of the memorialists’ archives would not challenge it either: the Arnaldi, Repeta, Verità, Muronovo, Guastaverza, and Stoppi owned more land in 1500 than in 1400.

Still, the phenomenon may not have been as drastic as is usually concluded. For starters, historians are overinclined to accept documents of acquisition at face value. Contemporaries, however, freely acknowledged that many instruments were fictitious, to disguise loans or protect assets from creditors. Four of Silvestro Arnaldi’s purchases, for example, should be removed from the balance sheet: the instrument of one was later admitted to be fictum et
simulatum, and in the three others the actual buyer—a countryman—used Silvestro as a front.⁵

Further, it is necessary to take into account the biases of extant documentation. Families generally preserved parchment records of incoming land, since these were necessary to sustain future claims. They had no reason to keep records of land that they alienated. If they sold a field to a cultivator, the new owner would order the instrument—but the archives of smallholders have not survived. Silvana Collodo has noted that Paduans only drew up documents when their loans could not be repaid and they assumed the borrower’s land in compensation, but did not bother to do so if loans were repaid. Surviving records, then, document a citizen’s successful acquisition of land for debt, but not a cultivator’s successful retirement of debt. We can conclude that land invariably passed from cultivator to urban lender, which is what the archives seem to show, only if we make the dubious assumption that all loans resulted in default.⁶

In the widespread concealed loan transaction, a borrower “sold” land to the lender; he was then reinvested with the land for a fixed rent (the interest) and given the chance to redeem (“francate”) it within a few years. Archives of the elite only rarely indicate that the cultivator repaid the loan and recovered title—two of fifteen cases in Lucca,⁷ two of several hundred cases in the Arnaldi archive. But, again, family parchments do not tell the whole story. Several dozen humble paper documents in notarial registers record cases in which the borrower did, in fact, francate the land.⁸ In many other cases, though these too never appeared in the family archive, the Arnaldi sold land outright.⁹ A reverse flow of ownership, from patricians to rustics, is revealed when the evidence base is notarial minute and imbreviature rather than private archives—but that is not where historians usually look.

Roberto Greci, examining the patrimony of the Rossi family of Parma, confessed an inability to track the history of individual properties. A given field appears once, in a lease or purchase document, then disappears from the record.¹⁰ The evanescence of land equally characterizes the copious Arnaldi documentation, where only a handful of fields can be firmly identified within the family’s patrimony over the long duration. It is possible, of course, that missing lands were combined with others to form compact holdings that bore new boundaries and names. But land reconfiguration is not a completely satisfactory explanation, for the Vicentine at least, because (as will be seen) owners faced considerable obstacles in consolidating scattered fields. As the imbreviature hint, it is entirely possible and logical that many of these ephemeral properties were ceded to peasants through sale or francation. It will also be
seen that land rights had become fearsomely tangled by the Quattrocento, such that an inattentive owner might lose track of dues and eventually lose the land to a peasant’s prescriptive right or simple occupation; one hospital’s land survey notes that “these six pieces of land were in the old inventory as they are listed here, but at present they can’t be found.” In the single village for which ownership has been systematically studied (Lisiera in the Vicentine), the percentage of fields owned by urban patricians actually declined over the course of the Quattrocento, from 61 percent to 46 percent, while that owned by local residents rose from 5 percent to 18 percent.11

Furthermore, it is far from certain that Veneto patricians built up landed patrimonies exclusively or even predominantly at the expense of small cultivators, who had only dribs and drabs of widely scattered property to cede. More significant accretions came, instead, from the goods of ex-rulers, from other patricians, or from ecclesiastical corporations. Early in the fifteenth century the fisc sold vast Scaligeri holdings in Verona and Vicenza, and Carraresi holdings in Padua; the Verità acquired land in Soave, Mozzecane, Nogara, and elsewhere for 15,870 ducats.12 When Alvise Dal Verme’s rebellion failed in 1441, the fisc confiscated his enormous estates and sold them to Venetian and mainland patricians. Listing his holdings in Verona required sixty-two dense folios; while the extent of his property in Vicenza cannot be known, it is certain that the Arnaldi picked up a large bloc in Agugliaro. Fellow patricians eventually acquired much of the Dal Verme land originally bought by Venetians.13

Citizens of Padua and Verona had earlier amassed large estates in the Vicentine. With the cities separated jurisdictionally and fiscally in the Quattrocento, absentee ownership became a nuisance and many liquidated their Vicentine holdings. The Arnaldi, for example, paid 1,200 ducats for the Veronese Antonio del Cozza’s land and land rights in Nuvoledo and Porcileto in 1447, and soon purchased Bartolomeo Giuliai’s possessions in Villabalzana and Leonardo Nogarola’s property in Poiana.14 At the end of the century Padua’s Dotti family sold the Arnaldi a variety of urban and rural lands.15 Vicenza’s Monza leased 1,419 campi in Dueville from the Veronese Cortese Serego in 1407, purchased the land outright in 1435 for 900 ducats, and provided a further 560 ducats in 1446 to retire Serego’s right of repurchase.16

Within the city, straitened patricians such as the Orgiano, Garzatori, and Schitini sold chunks of land to the Arnaldi and their prosperous colleagues, or borrowed money and subsequently defaulted on land pledges.17 When older houses failed biologically, which frequently happened (Pagliarini listed many more extinct noble families than the 271 extant), their patrimonies passed to
others of their class. While outright sale of ecclesiastical lands was uncommon, citizens of Vicenza and Verona (as did counterparts in Tuscany and Lombardy) obtained church property in perpetual lease for a nominal rent.¹⁸

According to another commonplace, later medieval merchants progressively pulled capital out of commerce for investment in land, responding to a highly volatile and stagnant or even contracting commercial economy.¹⁹ For the Veneto, Angelo Ventura modified the thesis considerably: while accepting “a general tendency to abandon mercantile activities for landed investment,” he denied that capital for land acquisition came from liquidation of commercial and industrial interests. Rather, he argued, public office, professional careers, ecclesiastical benefices, fiefs and land rights granted by rulers, and tax farming provided acquisition capital. Thus land represented not a diversion from trade but simply a new sector for investment of non-commercial income. Further, his demonstration of considerable profit from land reclamation and intensified exploitation indicates that agricultural investment was not due to slumping trade or fear of commercial risk.²⁰

The archives of Veneto memorialists confirm his position: as notaries and lawyers, ecclesiastical feudatories and tax farmers, all enjoyed sufficient non-commercial incomes that they did not have to liquidate businesses to build up landed patrimonies. Nor did they see business and land as incompatible. Land rents might maintain a lifestyle but could not expand a patrimony, and the merchant who tried to liquidate commercial interests to fund property accumulation would soon run out of money. The Guastaverza were simultaneously wool merchants and landowners; the Stoppi styled themselves mercatores into the sixteenth century, well after their campaign of land acquisition reached maturity. Those who abandoned commerce, such as the later Arnaldi, did so for social reasons—ceasing “vile” trades to ease access into the nobility—and not because business was poor. Even they remained active in farming ecclesiastical incomes, cash and agricultural loans, and the wholesale food trade.

The careers of Veneto memorialists do suggest a slight modification of Ventura’s position: income from office and the service sector was not directly invested in the land, but passed through the intermediate sector of the credit market. Default on loans, not purchase, was the most common means of accumulation.²¹ That feature, in turn, raises the issue of the land market. Here, too, there is an ulterior historiographical debate: the degree to which land transactions were governed by an open market, an accumulative ethic, and the forces of supply and demand, setting the stage for capitalist agriculture in the early modern period.²²
For the Veneto, the notion of rationalism in the land market is open to two objections. The first is that urban owners found it difficult to mount programmatic campaigns of land acquisition and consolidation because the credit market rather than the open market was the usual mechanism for acquisition. Patricians picked up land by defaults on loans, but had to be satisfied with whatever was offered as collateral. Most commonly, pledged fields lay not adjacent to their own but in another village altogether: the Arnaldi owned land in seventy-seven different jurisdictions. Irregular opportunities for accumulation and the prevalence of scattered and small fields prevented or at least retarded the rationalizing schemes of even the most enterprising owners.

Second, Veneto evidence supports Wickham's thesis of noneconomic pricing. It is impossible to establish more than a rough range of land values—the value of a single campo of arable land might be rated at anywhere from eight ducats to twenty-five ducats—because acquisition most commonly came not from purchase but as a consequence of the sale/leaseback concealed loan. In such transactions, the stated value of the land was determined not by market price but by the need to preserve a 6 percent ratio of rent (the interest) to nominal value (the loan). Land values were usually rounded off to multiples of ten or twenty-five lire or ducats, even for fields of varied dimensions and types. In another type of transaction, the buyer declared a global percampo value for miscellaneous fields: so the Arnaldi bought the large Pirli holding at a flat price of twenty-five ducats per campo. Here the land value was set high to conceal interest charged on long-term amortization.23 Credit needs, not the land market, determined the stated value of property.

Tenure and Cultivation

The secondary literature has focused on Tuscan sharecropping. In schematic form, agriculture under mezzadria shared several features: loss of peasant ownership; formation of compact holdings; short-term leases; owner's obligation to provide or lend working capital, seed, and equipment; tenant's obligation to live on the podere and cultivate its lands exclusively (and consequent breakup of villages); introduction of mixed-crop cultivation (coltura promiscua); and partition of the harvest between owner and tenant.

Though sharecropping was everywhere a minority tenure in the fifteenth century—even in Tuscany, where it was earliest and most common, only 29.6 percent of rustics in the Florentine dominion were mezzadri in 1469, and the system was nearly absent in Pisa, Lucca, and Arezzo24—at its actual incidence is beside the point. Near-obsession with mezzadria and other par-
timey tenures has been driven not by historical but by historiographic concerns: by a revisionism that blasts the paternalist "myth of the mezzadria," with images of progressive owners and deferential, contented peasants; by those who, noting the dominance of sharecropping into contemporary times, trace the medieval origins of a more "modern" or "rational" tenure; by the thesis that sharecropping represented one aspect of a "feudal reaction" and bourgeois "return to the land" that stunted the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

Given the amount of attention historians have devoted to mezzadria and its various subtopics, it is difficult to evaluate a region in which much of the debate is inapplicable. True, several large holdings in the flatlands of the Veronese and Vicentine countryside come close to the perceived norm. Lands of Gian Pietro Proti in Bolzano Vicentino, for example, were largely given out in partiy contracts in which tenants yielded half of the major grains and a third of lesser grains, hay, and grapes. In addition, the owner furnished seed and agricultural implements to tenants. Use of written, short-term contracts, formation of poderi, intensified investment, land reclamation, and the introduction of new crops moved several swathes of the Veronese countryside close to mezzadria.

But the Proti estates and Veronese counterparts were studied because they were well established and highly organized, and left particularly rich archives; they do not, by that token, represent the norm. When, as in the majority of cases, ownership was more recent, management less systematic, and holdings less consolidated, Veneto lands bore little resemblance to those under mezzadria in Tuscany. Outside a few aristocratic estates, fields were small: 70 percent to 80 percent were less than two hectares in the holdings of S. Maria in Organo and the parish of Isola della Scala, and less than a hectare in the patrimony of the Veronese hospital of SS. Giacomo and Lazzaro. The nearly five thousand fields described in the Arnaldi archives averaged under a hectare and a half, and those in the Vicentine villages of Lisiera and Dueville were even smaller.

Most land was held in traditional twenty-nine-year and perpetual leases, by tenants who lived in nucleated settlements and paid fixed rents of cash or kind. As Veronese councils proclaimed in 1478, "In all Italy no place is more leased out (livellata) than ours." The Arnaldi, who owned land throughout the countryside and thus managed a wider variety of lands than did the Proti, set partiy leases in only 6 percent of their holdings, with an additional 2.5 percent given out for a mixed rent of money, produce, and a share of the harvest (see appendix, table 6.1). Even that figure is misleadingly high,
since their partiyar tenures were almost always perpetual. Only three of 366 transactions indicate true *mezzadria*, with the Arnaldi providing seed in exchange for a fixed share of the harvest throughout a short-term contract.\textsuperscript{32}

Both the twenty-nine-year and the perpetual lease, known as emphyteusis,\textsuperscript{33} were grounded in the notion of a dual ownership of land: the overall proprietor held *dominium directum*; the tenant possessed a *dominium utile*, which guaranteed substantial autonomy in land management. As long as he paid rent, the holder of *utile* determined crops, rotations, and techniques. He could, moreover, bequeath, pledge, or mortgage his rights to the land, or even sell the *utile* outright, subject only to the proprietor’s right to match the sale price (by *prelazione*) and reclaim the *utile*.\textsuperscript{34}

Initially, emphyteutic land was held by an unwritten, customary arrangement, which could prove dangerous to inattentive owners. Several jurists, particularly Bartolus, noted that the cultivator might acquire *dominium directum* by not paying rent for a generation or two, by right of prescription, if the owner of the *directum* did not offer formal challenge. To guard against inadvertent alienation of land, owners by around 1400 insisted on a written contract that demanded renewal every nine or ten years. Governments, too, sought to replace customary with more firmly defined tenures: Vicentine statutes in 1425 and Venetian doges after 1451 required that cultivators without a contract should be regarded as holding their land in emphyteusis. In a similar vein, Veronese statutes of 1450 set the principle that, on all lands purchased from the Scaligeri or Visconti fisces after 1387, tenants should be regarded as “true emphyteutics and leaseholders in perpetuity,” as should their heirs and successors; owners were obliged to renew the tenures at an unchanged rent.\textsuperscript{35}

Contracts ordering regular renewals may have brought greater discipline to landholding, but left the basic relationship unaltered. Renewal was automatic, a formality usually allowed to lapse; documents of renewal are extremely rare except when death and inheritance introduced new owners or tenants, and none changed the terms of the arrangement. Contracts did not give owners any greater control over cultivation; indeed, by ratifying the tenant’s possession of *dominium utile*, they established the tenant’s freedom from interference in actual management. They spelled out the perpetual term of the *locatio*, and so protected the tenant against arbitrary eviction. Further, a rent fixed on parchment could not easily be increased.

Not only was ownership divided, but the rights and obligations of each party could be subdivided and separately alienated. For example, an intermediary might receive land from the owner of the *dominium directum*, then
grant the land to the actual cultivator in a perpetual sublease; alternatively, this middle figure might purchase the *utile* from the cultivator and lease it back to him, promising to forward rents to the holder of the *directum*. This offered considerable convenience for absentee owners, priests, and ecclesiastical corporations, who were freed from direct management, and offered profits for entrepreneurs such as the Arnaldi and the Verità, who made part-time careers as owner-agents of the *utile* of others’ lands.\textsuperscript{36}

Because the rent (*fitto*) established in the emphyteutic contract was fixed and in theory certain, Baldus had said, the proprietor could mortgage the land with the income as surety.\textsuperscript{37} The principle was thus established that the *dominium directum* and the income of the land were two distinct assets, and could be owned by separate persons. By the Quattrocento people bought, sold, pledged, and mortgaged *fitti* freely, without, however, alienating the *directum* itself. When on several occasions Silvestro Arnaldi paid considerable sums for *fitti*, he bought rights to an income, almost like buying an annuity, but the land itself was peripheral. Indeed, the income was no longer directly connected to the land, and the notary usually did not bother to list the pieces.\textsuperscript{38}

The proliferation of tenants and subtenants did, however, play havoc with owners. With rents owed to one person and ownership held by another, with several intermediaries between cultivator and proprietor, and with one peasant owning the *utile* and another actually working the land, who exactly bore liability for dues? If one link in a chain of subleases did not pay rent or taxes, what were the obligations and rights of the others? The problem was exacerbated by the fact that tenants often did not notify owners when they alienated, divided, or sublet land, though the law said they had to do so; and tenants did not have to notify owners when they mortgaged lands of which they held the *utile*.\textsuperscript{39} A careless owner could easily lose track of an obligation altogether and eventually lose the land itself. Fear of the unwitting dissipation of ecclesiastical property led the Venetian Senate to prohibit leases of church lands beyond a three-year term without its permission, and the pope in 1467 forbade any leases for more than three years.\textsuperscript{40} Even careful managers such as the Arnaldi might lose their way in the maze of rents, subtenants, and divided obligations. When Silvestro Arnaldi tried to buy a tiny field from Matteo Nascimbene in 1498, neither party could determine the precise status of the land and the notary inserted a battery of clauses to cover contingencies. Silvestro might or might not own the land outright, he might or might not owe a *fitto*, and he might or might not be liable for taxes.\textsuperscript{41}
Improving the Land

From the later Trecento into the second quarter of the Quattrocento, evidence for the ruinous condition of the land is episodic but overwhelming. Vicentine communal petitions in 1388 complained that Paduan raiders torched the countryside and carried away animals, and asked for a debt moratorium to halt depopulation. Another petition two years later lamented that citizens "had not a penny to buy wheat" and that cultivators "were moving away lest they perish from hunger." By 1407 most villagers of Gambellara had fled their homes, and the "eight or nine families" that remained petitioned for tax relief. Land inventories commonly listed fields without tenants, houses without occupants, and fields "once arable and now waste." In the Veronese village of Colà, around 1400, 42 percent of the land was partly uncultivated and 10 percent totally vigra. Some 45 percent of Dueville's land was uncultivated or abandoned in 1407, and only 29 percent of house lots were inhabited. When Lisierna hit bottom slightly later, only half of its land was intensively cultivated, with the rest waste or given over to labor-extensive use such as forest and pasture. The Paduan countryside, too, suffered "ecological degradation" from sharp depopulation, and much of Friuli reverted to forest.

Similar conditions in Tuscany allowed owners to consolidate fractioned holdings, buying and merging vacant lands into poderi, setting the stage for improvements in crops and changes in tenures later in the century. In the Veneto, however, a variety of factors combined to reduce owners' ability to take advantage of the crisis. Many of these have been noted. Lands acquired by loan default, dowry transfers, and debt were scattered (the Arnaldi, for example, owned land in seventy-seven villages). Patrimonial divisions did not create coherent holdings: while the Arnaldi held clusters of land in and around the villages of Setteca, Nuvoledo, and Meledo, brothers usually received a portion of each. Since proprietors had several perpetual tenants in any given village, each holding several small and separated fields, owners faced considerable practical obstacles to overriding the integrity of fields and tenancies to effect integration.

Emphyteusis itself posed obstacles to increased exploitation. Classic definition of the tenure assumed that rent was both monetary ("pro nummo annuatim solvendo") and fixed. This soon became true in practice as well. Fitti in money grew as a proportion of all rents—on the Arnaldi lands, from 20 percent to 71 percent over the 1400–1499 period, simultaneous with a decline of rents in kind from 26 percent to 15 percent (see appendix, table 6.1). Among mixed rents of money and produce, which fell from 45 percent to
6 percent, the share of produce declined to the purely symbolic—a pair of chickens at Christmas, a dozen eggs at Easter. Owners consequently suffered a slow erosion of income, as coinage devaluation and inflation reduced the real value of monetarized rents, and they could not benefit from strong agricultural prices later in the century. Over the long haul, cash fitti became exiguous, even nominal. Giovanni Bertrachini, professor at Padua, noted that returns from emphyteusis were “modest” and bore little relation to the market value of crops produced; they might constitute little more than formal recognition of the landlord’s rights.45

When the tenant of an emphyteutic holding was removed by death or old age, the proprietor could neither recover control nor raise rents: tenants enjoyed the right to bequeath their dominium utile, and heirs received the utile under the terms of the former contract. Furthermore, the doge declared in 1466, if the utile were sold and the new holder expressed willingness to pay the original rent, he could not be disturbed in his tenure.46 On four occasions the Arnaldi were obliged to accept a new tenant at reduced rent, and only once commanded a slight increase.47 On hundreds of occasions the fitto remained constant.

Even when an emphyteutic tenant simply gave up the land, the owner did not regain control, since local custom allowed an outgoing cultivator to name his successor. So, for example, Giovanni fu Pietro resigned his jus utile et livellaria in a suburban field to Gaspare Arnaldi in 1433, on the condition that Jacopo fu Gabriele be invested with the land. Jacopo indeed received the field, at the same rent. A decade later, in Verona, the Guastaverza brothers renounced an episcopal fief with the stipulation that a cousin be invested in their stead. Examples of substitution persist into the later Quattrocento, even though a burgeoning rural population might in theory have reduced tenants’ leverage.48 In every case, the new fitto was the same as the old.

Emphyteusis could not, however, deny change altogether. Owners in the Veneto seldom, it is true, matched the advances of counterparts elsewhere in building huge nucleated estates (Lombard cascine and Tuscan poderi), or undertaking massive land reclamation and irrigation projects (as in Lombardy), or diffusing intensive, mixed cultivation (as in Tuscany).49 Smaller, recent proprietors were less able than aristocrats and ecclesiastical corporations to effect fundamental alteration. But obstacles were never insurmountable, and even heavily emphyteutic areas of the Veronese and Vicentine countryside experienced modest reform.

The most obvious course was simply to rationalize and intensify management. Progressive owners began to keep systematic records and insist that
documents detail tenants' rights and obligations. Gaspare Monza, for example, demanded that tenants actually make ten-year renewals of their contracts, recognizing his ownership and rehearsing the terms of tenures, an act very rarely performed in previous generations. After midcentury newcomers such as the Arnaldi followed the lead of traditional holders such as the Thiene, Valmarana, and the Ospedale Proti by employing factors or gastaldi to oversee their lands.

Concentration of the patrimony was also a priority. The early Arnaldi, for example, acquired land wherever possible. But collection of rents from seventy-seven locales was inefficient, and the second generation focused their attentions. They alienated fields in distant villages where they owned only a few campi. In one characteristic transaction of 1483, Silvestro Arnaldi traded scraps of land in Tretto, Liviera, and the city for plots in Marola and Bertesinella, where he already possessed substantial holdings. He lost income and had to apply to the pope and the Venetian Senate for permission to make the exchange, but in return he reversed his father's tendency toward diffuse accumulation. Simultaneously, Silvestro abandoned the indiscriminate lending habits of his father and uncle, and made loans mostly to his own tenants and to cultivators in clusters of villages—Nuvoledo-Porcileto, Setteca-Bertesinella-Marola—where the bulk of his property was concentrated. When insolvent debtors yielded their fields, Silvestro had more compact holdings.

Owners also encouraged more intense exploitation through labor-intensive cultivation on mixed-use lands. The key innovation was the spread of viticulture. Grapes could be grown on the margins of arable fields, on hillsides, and on miscellaneous scraps of land unsuited for arable crops. Since peak periods of labor demands (harvest and crushing in September-October, trimming in the winter) fell between the times when workers were most occupied with arable crops (sowing winter wheat in late fall and summer wheat and legumes in the spring, harvest in mid- to late summer), viticulture also did not require additional human resources. The percentage of Arnaldi fields described as purely arable declined from 30 percent to 16 percent over the course of the century, and the percentage of fields that supported a mixed cultivation of arable crops, vines, and fruit trees rose from 40 percent to 61 percent (see appendix, table 6.2). In the hamlet of Lisiera, similarly, the percentage of campi combining arable crops and vines more than doubled, while single-use cultivation fell sharply.

Reclamation of waste began about the same time. The Proti had systematized rivers in Bolzano Vicentino since the later Trecento, and contracts and
tenures designed to bring land into cultivation had been known throughout the peninsula for several centuries. But for the most part Veronese and Vicentines had neither the labor nor the capital to undertake the work of cutting watercourses, building dykes, and clearing forests before about 1440. After that point, however, constant reference to land “once waste and now arable,” “formerly pasture and now with vines,” “previously forest and now planted,” and “lots once empty and now with houses,” demonstrates that a once-derelict countryside was experiencing strong recovery.

The forests of Lisiera disappeared by 1500, and the proportion of land described as uncultivated or waste shrank to a fraction of the total. By the last quarter of the century, repopulation of the countryside reached the point of overcrowding, and the Vicentine city council tried to block house construction by those with smaller holdings. The Venetian government, needing oak timbers for ships, grew concerned about deforestation. On the positive side, boasted Giorgio Sommariva in 1478, Verona could now export a quarter of its wheat harvest.

To put land into cultivation and to encourage viticulture on purely arable lands, owners began to experiment with partiary and/or short-term contracts. In 1427, for example, Pietro Boni invested cultivators with a large field on a ten-year renewable lease, in return for one-third of grain harvested. The tenants could use the pasture for their own animals, but were obliged to spread manure on a campo of arable land yearly; Boni, for his part, agreed to pay half the cost of digging ditches and building terraces. Beginning in the 1440s, improvement leases demanding deforestation or drainage of low-lying land became common.

These contracts had in common a short duration (usually ten years) and a partiary rent (usually a third of produce).

In contrast with emphyteutic contracts, improvement leases often imposed specific conditions that sometimes approach the stipulations of mezzadria contracts. The Barcellari brothers, for example, were forbidden to work other lands and owed labor services; their Arnaldi landlords promised to furnish wheat, rye, and beans for sustenance and to lend seed grains. Seeking to bring an eighty-campi forest into cultivation within five years, Gaspare Monza required his tenants to clear ten campi annually, plant vines and trees, establish rows of willows along watercourses, and create fields and pastures from reclaimed land. In return, he was to receive one-third of the crops.

Some ecclesiastical corporations in Verona and Padua were equally aggressive in promoting reclamation, improvement leases, short-term and partiary tenures, investment in infrastructure, direct management, and a salaried workforce. Clerics in Vicenza were more conservative, remaining loyal to emphyteutic tenures, but they too brought wasteland into cultivation. They
possessed incentives unavailable to lay proprietors: by the terms of a papal bull of 1444, the bishop of Vicenza could grant tithes on reclaimed lands to the entrepreneurs who organized deforestation and drainage of "swampy and nearly sterile" lands. Other ecclesiastical owners gave exemptions from tithes to offset "great labors and expenses" of bonifiche. Monasteries and the cathedral chapter could also offer much larger chunks of land than the laity—150 campi in Noventa, 367 in Villaruina, and 1,200 to 1,500 around Villalta.

In yet another respect, progressive landlords made headway against the immobility of emphyteutic agriculture. From the middle of the fifteenth century on, many owners of dominium directum recovered the dominium utile of their lands. Consolidating title was neither simple nor cheap, since new owners had to buy out tenants as well as former proprietors. In one typical case, Nicolo Colombi renounced his jus livellaria in the village of La Longa to his landlord Bartolomeo Fava in exchange for a hundred ducats. Andrea and Tommaso Arnaldi had supplied Fava with the money; they then paid Fava an additional hundred ducats for the combined dominia of the land. The transaction was typical, as well, because the cost of the utile was the same as the cost of the land: in the twenty-five cases in which calculation is possible, the value of jus livellaria and the value of dominium directum were about the same. Breaking a perpetual lease, in other words, cost as much as the land itself. But this was virtually the only way to raise rents, introduce partiary tenures, combine small fields, or shorten the term of the lease on extant lands, and owners were willing to pay the price.

Owners and Tenants

Peasant Misery and Resistance

Reading Tuscan rural history can be a grim experience. Peasants, pushed into debt by usurious loans, grasping landlords, and mounting taxation, ceded their lands to the urban rich and remained only as tenants and/or salaried workers. Owners imposed increasingly harsh terms on cultivators, demanding labor services and reducing the proportion of capital and equipment that they furnished. Creation of poderi, and sharecroppers' obligation to reside on the farm, broke village solidarity and imposed isolated habitation. Short-term leases denied security to cultivators and robbed them of incentive to make improvements. The aged and infirm were simply discarded. The sole alternative to grinding poverty was flight into the uncertain, often hostile urban environment.
Much of the published work for the Veneto echoes Tuscan themes, particularly in demonstrating cultivators' debt, the buildup of estates, and the reduction in owners' contributions. Looking at seventy-six Friulan cases, for example, Paolo Cammarosano noted that only 21 percent of cultivators were able to pay anything close to what they owed. As in Tuscany, wealthier smallholders emigrated into and paid taxes for the city, leaving villagers with a much-reduced tax base. Vignettes from the archives are as poignant as those from Florence. The case of the Dueville widow, forced to sell her last field to raise the cash to bury her son, is perhaps melodramatic but no less telling; so was Giovanni della Grana's flight to avoid crushing arrears. The *impotentia* of Madonna Flora, unable to feed her seven daughters and two sons, won a judge's permission to sell her single *campo* to Silvestro Arnaldi. The Venetian government tried to block alienation of common assets by rural communes, but villagers of Longare were in such "extreme poverty and urgent necessity" that they were allowed to sell pasture rights to the Vicentine noble Domenico Scrofa.

Still, what are we to make of recurrent debt? When a tenant acknowledges unpaid rents for year after year, his economic status may indeed have deteriorated, but he may instead have proven resistant to eviction. Some caution is due. To take one lead example: by mid-1449 Michele Revese had not paid rent for five years, and the Arnaldi went to court to force payment. Six months later the Arnaldi were still trying to seize an equivalent value in two pieces of land. Four months after that a judge ordered that Revese not impede the Arnaldi in taking possession of the fields. Revese continued to resist, despite a restraining order in the spring of 1451. When he finally acknowledged both his debt and the Arnaldi version of the story in the spring of 1452, his claims actually triumphed: the Arnaldi brothers leased the land back to him at the original rent. After three years of legal maneuver, matters were back to square one. None of the arrears had been paid. Revese's heirs were still on the land a generation later, and still far behind in paying the rent.

Verità Verità, too, left the courts with small satisfaction. He had sued a man of Tregnago for back rent and a judgment of twelve ducats for poor cultivation, but the defendant denied the obligation in part by pointing out that it had been incurred by his father. In a compromise, Verità cancelled debts and expenses, and in return the tenant renounced the holding on the condition that he be reinvested with the land. Verità gained only a new and presumably more ironclad contract, plus clarification of the tenancy. Tenants knew how to use the legal system to fend off creditors. Eviction, confiscation, and seizure of goods required long, drawn-out, and frequently futile
litigation; as was the case in Tuscany, lawsuits were usually unsuccessful in forcing payment and were used primarily to force out-of-court settlement.

It should not, in theory, have been that way. Municipal law provided owners with apparently sure mechanisms for collecting debts and shedding unwanted tenants. In Vicenza, rent cases received summary judgment, avoiding the laborious *cursus* of civil suits. The city's entire police force was put at the disposal of the official delegated to oversee the collection of debts and debt-pledges (*pegni*). In Verona, debt cases were heard on any day the courts were open, tenants could not leave property until their rents were paid, and immediate kin were obligated for a tenant's dues. Nonpayment of rent for two successive years automatically cancelled the tenant's rights of *dominium utile*, as did alienation of the *utile* without the owner's permission.

But a legal system stacked in favor of landlords did not provide failsafe means of obtaining satisfaction. Eviction, the most serious penalty, was also the most difficult to effect. Owners, in fact, seldom enforced the two-year rule, and allowed unpaid rents to pile up well beyond that point. Faced with a depopulated countryside, they found it difficult to secure new tenants, and they might have to accept a lower rent when bidding for cultivators. Anyway a new tenant was not necessarily preferable to a proven debtor, since nearly everyone seemed to owe something. So, when Zampiero Bule ran up the considerable debt of 424 *lire* in goods and rents, he received his lands back in lease on the usual terms. Only when matters got out of hand did landlords in the Veneto—as was the case in Lucca—actually remove those in arrears: the Arnaldi absorbed fifteen years of nonpayment before evicting some tenants in Meledo, and even then the former *livellari* successfully claimed the right to ratify the new investiture.

Documents ordering eviction or substitution of tenants are rare. Owners preferred legal action to collect arrears, but even here their hand was weak. Recalcitrant debtors delayed judgment by failing to appear when cited, sending representatives to challenge every stage of the procedure, and simply refusing to comply with judgments. Silvestro Arnaldi won a judgment against the Viti family of Setteca in 1485, and a second judgment the following year; only in May 1489 did the podesta's vicar declare that the disputed grain belonged to Silvestro, and another three months passed before he ordered actual execution of his sentence. Somewhat later Silvestro failed to collect some rents in the village of Poiana for sixteen years. When he lost patience and went to court, his petition to sequester some hay required fifteen court hearings. Between nonappearance in court and formal protest of each citation and sequestration order, the tenant dragged the affair on for eight months. At
that point the register falls silent, and we do not know if Silvestro ever re-
ceived anything.\textsuperscript{71}

Tenants knew, as well, how to exploit the system for demanding debt-
plies. In Verona, most debtors exercised their right of \textit{vetatio pignoris} and
refused to provide debt-plges; at that point the judge reviewed the case and,
if the original sentence was upheld, imposed an additional fine, but the out-
come was often yet another unpaid pledge. Sheer poverty may have been the
reason, but Varanini suspects that “obstructionist anticitizen boycott” played
a major role as well.\textsuperscript{72} Vicentine village chiefs routinely ignored orders to
bring \textit{pegni} to the city; thousands of prosecutions of \textit{decani} in the five sur-
viving registers equally suggest rural collusion against citizens’ demands. In
a single year (1452) the hamlet of Lisiera, counting at most 170 inhabitants,
twenty-three times failed to deliver pledges. Recusant \textit{decani} were summoned
before urban courts and fined three \textit{lire}, but it is uncertain that they could
then be forced to execute the original order.\textsuperscript{73}

Countrymen based one effective strategy for resistance on women’s dis-
tinct and protected legal status. Up to a quarter of village chiefs prosecuted
for not producing pledges recruited wives or female relative to represent them
before urban tribunals. They knew that women faced no personal risk, since
statutes forbade the incarceration of women or their sureties for debt; by cus-
tom, a pregnant woman could not be forced to appear at all.\textsuperscript{74} Moreover,
judges found it difficult to force a woman to pay a debt on behalf of others
since her own goods were presumed to derive from her dowry, and hence
were protected from creditors. Anyway the fines levied on women refusing
to pay a pledge were only half to two-thirds of those levied on men.\textsuperscript{75} The
original debtor and the village as a whole reaped the benefit of women’s par-
tial immunity.

Neither arrears nor back taxes could be seized from goods secured for the
eventual restitution of a dowry. Landlords and tax officials complained that
tenants piled up dowry obligations and other hypothes to withstand credi-
tors;\textsuperscript{76} the man of Tregnago claimed that his lands were obligated for no fewer
than three dowries—a point Verità was forced to concede. Owners could not,
however, remove this obstacle without undermining the dowry system as a
whole. Strongly rooted legal theory gave dowries priority over other claims
to a patrimony, and since (by the authoritative opinion of Baldus) a wife’s
dowry constituted a general claim on a man’s property, a tenant could argue
that all his goods were so obligated.\textsuperscript{77} At best, owners obtained a decision
that their claims held priority over those of all creditors except the fisc and
anyone holding dowry hypothes.\textsuperscript{78} After all, judges and patrician owners
were also husbands and fathers, with vested interests in protecting the dotal goods of their own womenfolk. But they had, on that account, to accept the fact that tenants could use general dowry protections against their own claims.

The Venetian government came down on the side of rural debtors. Fearful that impoverished cultivators would be driven off the land, with consequent harm to tax revenues, food supplies, and military conscription, central magistracies mitigated the seizure of goods for debts and past rents. In 1444 Paduan rustics complained that tax officials seized pledges from any villager if they could not find the actual debtor; the doge forbade the taking of pledges from anyone except the debitor principalis. The ruling soon extended to cover the entire mainland and all debts: in 1448 the Senate forbade the jailing of decani or other rustics for the debts of fellow villagers “because it is not right that the innocent should suffer punishment for the offender.”

A decade later the Senate issued a thunderous decree against the taking of work animals as debt-pledges, and later extended protection to carts, plows, and agricultural equipment.

The Avogadori di Comun, meanwhile, supported the right of tenants to receive compensation for improvements, which raised the cost to owners of evicting cultivators. A ducal letter of 1476 went further, declaring that tenants who improved holdings could not be deprived of their rights of dominium utile, though they could be compelled to pay back rent. Later doges, in rulings addressed to specific cases but regarded as general precedents, blocked eviction of tenants for nonpayment. A Paduan abbess, for example, was prevented from expelling a tenant who had not paid rent for two years, the term established by law; a Ravennese landlord could not evict a tenant twenty-five years in arrears “because we do not wish that anyone who for a decent reason cannot pay the rent should be deprived of rights which he holds by lease or emphyteusis.”

Deeply indebted cultivators, then, were neither thrown off their land nor reduced to landless laborers. The last document in any series is likely to show them as deeply entrenched as before, despite mounting arrears. Their capacity for survival may have been partly due to a distinctive land system: where, as in Pisa and Lucca as well as Verona and Vicenza, mezzadria and poderi were relatively rare, and holdings were scattered and fractioned, cultivators’ capacity for resistance was relatively strong. Those holding land from several owners were never dependent on any single landlord, and fellow villagers were better able to offer support because they, too, were not subject to an overwhelming proprietor. But the phenomenon may not have been purely local. Speaking of Tuscan mezzadri, Klapisch-Zuber has concluded that “On
the balance sheet, the rustic never seems to win. In reality, he knew how to make the best use of his work potential in a period of demographic penury that encouraged landlords to be more accommodating.84

To the demographic factor must be added tenants’ capacity to make the legal system work on their behalf: to leverage debt and dowries, to exploit dowry protections, and to use tortuous and inefficient legal procedures to fend off creditors. This is an unexpected source of assistance, and one suspects that patrician legislators were frequently annoyed to find their laws and procedures used against them as landowners. In any case, peasants were far from hapless before the law. Perhaps they were not so badly off as a grim Tuscan historiography wishes to demonstrate.

Resistance and Patronage

Friction between tenant and owner was episodic but recurrent, and frequently violent as well. Verona experienced some unsettling outbreaks: the 1425 assassination of a Venetian trying to collect rents, murders of rural vicars in the 1420s and 1442, and widespread arson in 1471. Anti-landlord sentiment came to a head in 1461–62, with murders of Venetians and citizens, assaults on owners, and attacks on property. Veronese countrymen made constant and highly organized protest against the erosion of the rural tax base, grants of citizenship to rural immigrants, and innovations such as the taking of rent in money rather than produce.85

Their Vicentine counterparts undertook no collective action, but individual towns sent endless embassies to Venice to dispute urban privileges. Rustics there also showed readiness to use force against landlords and urban officials. In 1456, for example, the Vicentine commune moved against the "audacity" of residents of the district who used threats and assaults to prevent owners from putting new tenants on their lands. The "impious" torching of a notable’s barn in Barbarano drew the wrath of the Venetian Senate, as did the murder of a factor of the great Loschi family, the ambush of the noble Gabriele Anguissola’s servant, and the killing of Antonio Giovanni Thiene.86 Villagers of Mason so harassed their landlord, the Paduan convent of S. Giustina, that its clerics gave up the fight and petitioned to sell the land; Jacopo da Poiana so terrorized the village of Campolongo that neither landlords nor even the local governor dared move against him.87

Ruling bodies and the upper ranks of society perceived a hostile rural population. Rustics were not, probably, more inclined to violence than other social categories, but they were numerous, distinctive, and inclined to mass
tumult: the rash of arsons in Cogollo, the wave of riots in Mason, and internecine slaughters in Marostica gave periodic reminders to an already nervous urban patriciate. Cultivators were not responsible for the private armies with which patricians carried on feuds, or for the endemic depredations of urban exiles who gathered in remote reaches, but authorities lumped the innocent and guilty together in general suspicion of all inhabitants of the countryside. Thus much anticrime legislation was targeted at the rural population. Early in the century Venetian councils forbade any rusticus vel districtualis to bring arms into the city of Vicenza. In 1444 Veronese councils, attempting to eradicate organized violence, outlawed rustics' wearing of partisan colors; four decades later the Vicentine commune complained of the "many scandals and infinite brawls" of countrymen, increased punishments for carrying arms, and forbade the wearing of "devices." City dwellers received a short term of exile for illegal gatherings; rustics suffered the same penalty, but with public flogging as well.

Fear is evident, as well, in literary genres that satirized peasants. Mockery and suspicion were but two facets of a single attitude: if rustics were animal-like and stupid, and thus the butt of tricks played by clever citizens, they were also brutish and inclined to violence and fraud. Watch tenants carefully, advised Giannozzo Alberti, for "you can't believe how much wickedness there is in cultivators raised among the clods." An anonymous Paduan of the Quattrocento summed up the prevailing view of the countryman:

Impious, cruel, enemy of all humility,
Crude, rough, full of every rottenness,
Born of chestnut stock,
Backward, outside humanity, rustic,
Lacking any good, son of a bitch.

The poems gathered in Maffeo Vegio's Sequentia rusticorum, which circulated in Verona, likewise mixed derision with an undertone of fear for the peasant's explosive anger. Only Giorgio Sommariva's sonetti villaneschi sought to temper abuse with sympathy, putting into the mouths of his peasant interlocutors some valid complaints against the oppression of fisc and army.

Such judicial and literary records are vivid and abundant, and tend to command center stage. They also tell only half the story. More genial relations between owner and tenant certainly existed, though they produced fewer and less memorable documents and have attracted less interest. One
pleasant exception comes from Dueville, near Vicenza, where villagers gathered in 1488 to toast their landlord: “The noble lord Gaspare fu Alberto of the House of Monza, by his labor, industry and vigilance, has brought the lands of Dueville (which were sterile and uncultivated) to the greatest fertility.”92 Many documents in notarial registers, in fact, attest to close working relations between owners and cultivators. When the people of Longare suffered from the fiscal tricks of the noble Domenico Scroffa, for example, they found a champion in the even more noble landowner Nicolo Valmarana. When villagers of Negrar in the Valpolicella sought to exclude foreignersto their common woods and pastures, they invited the landowner Bartolomeo Verità to their assembly to lend strength to their deliberations.93 For at least nine years the villagers of La Longa hired as their representative Andrea Arnaldi, who owned considerable land there; they clearly did not bear him ill will. The Arnaldi also served as agents to the commune of Setteca, where they had a villa and many fields.94 They frequently proferred *patrocinium* to individual countrymen, appearing in court, collecting debts, and handling tax payments. Many clients were also their tenants. Granted, the Arnaldi took fees for their work, but the greater point is that their workers trusted them with important business.95

Owners had strong self-interest in keeping the good will of rural dwellers. By allowing long-term debt and by extending loans that could not be repaid, the urban elite suffered economic loss but acquired clients who might further their other interests. Credit and debt markets thus functioned not strictly for financial gain, but rather for accumulation of social capital.96 The benefits that accrued from patronage were less tangible than profits from forcing payment through the courts, but—given peasants’ effective techniques for legal recalcitrance—might prove more effective in the long run. The Arnaldi, for example, carefully cultivated close ties with wealthier peasants such as the Piva and Bucellari, the “big men” of villages in which they had land; in return they gained increased leverage over all tenants. Veronese patricians frequently managed to have their factors and overseers listed in urban tax households, thus reducing dependents’ fiscal obligations; the reward, in all likelihood, was greater loyalty and vigilance. Long-term reclamation projects required stable tenancies, and farsighted owners might tolerate arrears or grant extensions of a francation period in return for a steady labor force. By showing mercy to debtors and not proceeding to eviction, Veronese and Vincentine proprietors collected labor services in busy months and thus avoided paying salaried labor.97

Cordial relations had other potential advantages. Tenants, for example, fre-
quently appeared as witnesses to landlords’ transactions. Most of the time this participation was a mere formality, but if the deal went sour and/or the document was disputed those witnesses were critical to proving a case in court. It says something, as well, that tenants and other *districtuales* were willing to support urban proprietors, even to the extent of offering testimony against fellow villagers. A further benefit came from the custom that the holder of the *utile* of land could be obliged to resell it to a former owner at the original price. By giving that former owner the capital to reclaim title, then buying the *utile* from him, the Arnaldi were assured of a low price; buying directly from the holder of the *utile* offered no price restrictions and they would have to pay a premium. First, however, they needed the former owner on their side. Alternatively, a tenant could renounce *utile* rights but specify a successor at the same rent; the Arnaldi acquired considerable *utile* cheaply by paying for the renunciation and having themselves named successor. Here, too, they needed a compliant cultivator.98

Reluctance to initiate eviction proceedings until debt got out of hand indicates that Veneto landlords preferred to carry insolvent tenants rather than disrupt the favor they enjoyed in the countryside. They were not unusually soft touches. Under Tuscan *mezzadria*, as David Herlihy has noted, uncollectable loans served to build up utilitarian friendship. In Lucca, too, debt was a key component of a fine network of relations binding owner and tenant. Proprietors, unwilling to jeopardize loyalties through lawsuit, found it socially and in the long run economically advantageous to leave smaller debts alone. The Rossi of Parma, in like fashion, preferred a light hand and built up a stable core of clients.99

**Business and Pleasure**

The thesis of the urban bourgeoisie’s “return to the land,” a staple in debate over refuedalization and the failed transition from feudalism to capitalism, has received trenchant criticism lately. Revisionists, led by Philip Jones, claim that citizen-merchants had always owned extensive properties in the countryside; the economic importance of landed patrimonies was no greater in the fifteenth century than it was in the thirteenth.100 Even if we accept that position, however, we are left with the question posed by Sante Polica: was ownership of land qualitatively different in the later period?101 In cultural terms, amid villa construction, the vogue for neochivalric trappings and the diffusion of pastoral poetics, did patricians of the Renaissance look at the landscape differently than had their predecessors?
The georgic hexameters of the Veronese Antonio Cipolla suggest that they did. He derived twofold joy from his estates around Porcile: pride in successful improvement of agriculture and pleasure in cultured leisure. Between negotia and otia, Cipolla felt that he had attained the ancient ideal of combining the active and contemplative lives in a single productive career. The twin themes of pleasure and utility are not, of course, his alone. Most famously, Alberti put into the mouth of one interlocutor the assertion that the primary function of land was alimentary self-sufficiency, but the same speaker also offered a graceful little discourse on the esthetic pleasures, good exercise, spiritual refreshment, and mental stimulation to be derived from a well-sited and well-run farm. The very study of literature deemed otia and negotia complementary. Reading the ancient treatises of Palladio, Varro, and Columella, as well as recent derivatives by Pier de' Crescenzi, Pagano Bonafede, and Michelangelo Tanaglia, the proprietor learned new crops and techniques while Horace, Theocritus, the later Cicero, and the Virgil of the Georgics and the Bucolics taught the delights of rural leisure. Moreover, he could draw on newly found justifications for rural life: Tanaglia's opinion that cultivation of the soil ranked only behind letters and arms in the hierarchy of honor, or Leonardo da Chio's definition of true or "Roman" nobility as based on agriculture.

Pleasure was at least a secondary priority for some Veneto proprietors. The Protidominica in Bolzano Vicentino was host to banquets and home to peacocks and hunting birds, and the Monza house in Dueville was decked with sumptuous decoration of fine cloth. Of the 263 Quattrocento Veneto villas catalogued by Martin Kubelik—70 percent of which lie in the Vicentine—a few are quite splendid. Still, for Kubelik and his sources, the definition of a villa is very broad indeed. Two Arnaldi villas in Setteca, for example, could most politely be described as farmhouses; both are today used as barns. Like most in the region, their architeconic forms relate to "practical-economic" functions and do not demonstrate a learned or esthetic vocabulary. With five or six rooms each, some clearly intended as byres or storehouses, the villas were a good deal less hospitable than the family's urban palaces. Spending time in the country meant roughing it.

Giving the label of villa to an edifice introduces anachronistic implications from the rich tradition of later centuries. It also begs the question of what the edifice was used for. The documentation suggests that patricians did not primarily view country living as a source of otium, a soothing haven from the heat and tumult of city life. They fled to the country to escape the plague, as did the Arnaldi in 1438 and the Ferretti in 1455. Manfredo Repeta was al-
most continually resident in Campiglia in the 1469–86 period, but as manager rather than occasional vacationer. *Villeggiatura*, the spending of summer months in otiose splendor, was not part of his agenda; he apparently lived year-round in the city for the last fifteen years covered in the *catasto*.

The Arnaldi spent heavily to refurbish one of their country houses, in the village of Nuvoledo. Payments indicate a substantial complex: for twenty-seven cartloads of lime, two hundred cartloads of stone, twenty thousand bricks, six thousand clamps, eight thousand roof-tiles, construction of a well and barn, and the labor of plastering.108 The timing of that campaign, just when the family had acquired great wealth and political access and was beginning to call itself noble, would be appropriate to aspirations to gentility. A daughter was born there in August 1464, and Silvestro Arnaldi is found there in August 1471,109 so there must have been some summer residence.

Residence was not only in the summer. Andrea did business from the Meledo house in January, while Silvestro stayed in Nuvoledo in the months of November and January. Overall, the Arnaldi were more commonly recorded in their country seats from November through February than in the summer. Bartolomeo Verità made a land investiture in Lavagna in January, and great-grandson Verità Verità did the same in Bardolino in February.110 These are rainy, cold, and blustery months, not the time to be out in the countryside if one had any choice in the matter. But business was business, and no amount of discomfort would justify passing up the chance to pick up a few more campi. Indeed, the buying and leasing of fields, and the collection of rents in kind, seems to have been the primary activity in the rural seats.

Even the Arnaldi *domus dominicali* in Meledo, substantial enough to draw the attention of a curious traveler, did not inspire much affection for the rustic life. Not long after he came into his inheritance, Andrea II Arnaldi leased the complex to a consortium of six men and retired to the old urban palace in Carpagnon. What he wanted from the country was neither ostentation nor repose, but 450 ducats, two plovers, eight carts of firewood, a hundred pounds of linen, a haystack, two and a half cartloads of wine, two hundred eggs, three loads of fruit, two cheeses, several hundredweights of oats, sorghum, millet, and wheat, a sack of nuts, a calf, and the carrying services to transport all these goods to the city.111 A subsequent Arnaldi repented and hired Palladio to design a villa in Meledo, but that is the story of a later era.112