In order to best learn what life was like in late medieval Italy, it is imperative to understand and investigate the notarial culture that permeated and reinforced nearly all human interactions of daily life. During the thirteenth century, Italy underwent what Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur has called a “documentary revolution”, an “explosion” of writing and documentary practice, that extended into all fields of administration—legislative, judicial, fiscal, military, and accounting. Vigueur emphasized the political aspect of the thirteenth-century transformation, but notarial records went beyond the political.1 These sources afford investigation into all aspects of medieval life because of the complete permeation of a contractual culture: the economy depended upon notarial contracts; the social bonds of marriage, guardianship and maintenance of family wealth and kinship strategies were enabled through acts and testaments; products of art were arranged with the aid of notaries; and even the religious used notarial acts to authenticate miracles and record candle offerings.

Bologna offers superb opportunities for examining notarial culture in action, because of its exceptional city registers, the Libri Memoriali and Provvisori. Of all notarial records, the testament offers perhaps the best window on to late medieval urban life, not only because it records people’s views on piety, charity, burial, and inheritance, but also because, like a net, it captures many historical subjects who were engaged in the socially significant behavior of making a will. Medieval people from all walks of life, except the destitute, were testators, and their decisions depended on the assistance of many others who served as notaries, witnesses and executors for their last wishes. The copies of testaments registered in the Memoriali and the original parchment wills that are preserved in the Demaniale, the archival holdings of the

suppressed religious houses, retain for investigation the actions and intentions of many men and women.

The testament is a rich and highly descriptive source, which has been intensively studied by historians of the social and religious history of medieval and Renaissance Italy. It is the contention of this work that the testament is one of the best, if not the best, source to study the experience of the Black Death because of the large number of people who wrote, or, more accurately, dictated wills and participated in the process of their production and preservation. Furthermore, during the epidemic, notarial activity was focused almost exclusively on producing testaments, thus it makes sense to aim our sights there. For the historian, the State Archives of Bologna provide perhaps the highest known concentration of wills remaining in northern Italy from the Black Death. While from the “normal” year of 1337 there remain 315 copies of wills in the Memoriali, for 1348 there are 1098 wills, 17 codicils for which there is no accompanying testament, 13 codicils for which the matching testament is preserved in 1348, and 19 wills that I have identified as duplicate and entered erroneously into the Memoriali. The corpus of extant wills from 1348 is completed by a further 85 parchment testa-

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2 The study of medieval Italian wills has generally fallen into two types of analysis, that of the history of religion or religious mentalities, and that of the history of the family or inheritance practices. Some American historians have used many wills as their primary source, such as Samuel Kline Cohn, Jr. who studied the religious mentalities of Renaissance Tuscans and Steven A. Epstein and Sally McKee who explored family and inheritance in thirteenth-century Genoa and Venetian Crete, respectively. Others have used wills as supplement to other sources, such as Dennis Romano’s work on communities in Renaissance Venice, Robert Brentano’s studies of religious ideas in Rieti and the social history of thirteenth-century Rome, Roisin Cossar’s study on confraternities of Bergamo, and Diane Owen Hughes’s work on the social world of artisan families in medieval Genoa. Unlike the Americans, Italian scholars have tended to focus on the religious mentalities. An example of such work for central Italy is the study by Bonanno, Bonanno and Pellegrini of pro anima legacies of Florentine testaments and for the Emilia Romagna region the studies of Antonio Samaritani on Ferrara, Cento, and Massafaglia. Recent work, however, on testamentary inheritance and the family has been carried out by Linda Guzzetti on Venice, by Elena Brizio and Gianna Lumia on Siena, Maria Luisa Lombardo-Mirella Morelli on Rome (see references in Bibliography). For a comprehensive study of the historiography of studies based on medieval Italian testaments see Martin Bertram, “Mittelalterliche Testamente: Zur entdeckung einer Quellengattung in Italien,” Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken 68 (1988), 509–545 and for European wills see Linda Guzzetti, “Testamentsforschung in Europa seit den 1970er Jahren: Bibliographischer Überblick,” in Seelenheil und irdischer Besitz: Testamente als Quellen für den Umgang mit den ‘letzten Dingen’, eds. Markwart Herzog and Cecilie Hollberg (Constance, 2007), 17–33.

3 Apart from the examination of codicils below, I have not used the 13 codicils corresponding to extant testaments nor the 19 duplicate wills in the analysis of this book.