

A shift in written practices. Rome and the ‘documentary revolution’ of the 12th century

by Dario Internullo

The paper reflects on the transformation in documentary practices between the 10th and 12th centuries, taking the city of Rome as a case study while situating it within a broader context. More specifically, it examines the major change in writing practices that several historians have defined as the ‘documentary revolution’. The phenomenon is analysed from two perspectives: first, its development within urban society; and second, its potential contribution to a broader reflection on the periodization of the High Middle Ages.

Il contributo si propone di riflettere sulle trasformazioni delle pratiche documentarie tra il X e il XII secolo, prendendo come caso di studio la città di Roma ma inserendola in un contesto più ampio. Più precisamente, intende riflettere su quel grande cambiamento nelle pratiche scritte che diversi storici definiscono ‘rivoluzione documentaria’, esaminando il fenomeno sia dal punto di vista del suo dispiegarsi nella società urbana, sia da quello del suo possibile contributo a una più generale riflessione sulla periodizzazione del pieno Medioevo.

Middle Ages, 10th-12th centuries, Italy, Latium, Rome, Notaries, Documentary Revolution.

Medioevo, secoli X-XII, Europa, Italia, Lazio, Roma, notariato, rivoluzione documentaria.

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1. *The ‘documentary revolution’*

Among the various phenomena that affected Europe between the 11th and 12th centuries, one that might at first glance be described as a shift in documentary practices stands out. This change became readily apparent when comparing documents produced before the 12th century with those from afterward, even within the same archive. Apart from specific figures, which of course vary from case to case, the number of preserved documents typically increases by an order of magnitude between the two periods: from 5 to 50, from 10 to 100, from 20 to 200, and so on. In addition to being more numerous, documents from the latter period also display qualitative differences: graphically, they are more organized and densely written; in terms of form, they are more standardized; from a legal perspective, they are more abstract and modelled on Roman law; socially, they are more inclusive, shedding light on strata beyond the aristocratic elite; and materially, they are more manageable – often, moreover, textually embedded within the new documentary form of the register.

This change is well known among scholars. Source editors and specialists in diplomatics have been aware of it since the beginning of the great census and publication of medieval documents in the 17th and 18th centuries. Although historians turned their attention to it later, they are now not only aware of the phenomenon, but have also built fruitful lines of research upon it. The space available here does not permit a detailed examination of this historiography, but three brief observations may be useful at the outset. The first is that the phenomenon appears to have been problematized for the first time by the British historian Michael Clanchy in a book published in 1979. In that work, Clanchy demonstrated that the administrative pervasiveness of the Norman monarchy between the late 11th and early 14th centuries fostered an unprecedented explosion of literacy in England, and second, that the phenomenon found parallels elsewhere, notably in the territories under the French monarchy.¹ The second observation is that, more recently, the phenomenon has been labelled ‘documentary revolution’. If I am not mistaken, it was Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur who first used this expression in 1995, in a review of Paolo Cammarosano’s influential book on medieval Italian written culture. Maire Vigueur proposed interpreting “the proliferation and transformation of genres that characterize the new documentary landscape of communal Italy from the 13th century onwards” as a veritable revolution. The definition has found wide acceptance among scholars of Italy – beyond its communal half – and, in recent times, has also been used to describe documentary changes in other parts of Europe.² The third observation is that this phenomenon of cul-

¹ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*. I am particularly grateful to Alberto Cotza, Enrico Faini, Paolo Tomei, and Massimo Vallerani for their stimulating and helpful discussions during the preparation of this essay.

² Cammarosano, *Italia medievale*; Maire Vigueur, “Révolution documentaire” (quotation on p. 180); Menant, “Les transformations;” Francesconi, “Potere della scrittura;” Bertrand, *Les écri-*

tural articulation concerns not only documentary practices but, more broadly, every aspect of the relationship between European societies and writing. The other side of the same coin is the cultural “Renaissance of the 12th century”, first theorized by Charles Haskins in the 1920s. This connection fully justifies the choice of some scholars to speak, more generally, of a ‘writing revolution’ (*révolution de l’écrit*).³

International historiography of the Middle Ages has thus reached a broad consensus on the existence of a historical process that may be described as a ‘documentary revolution’ or, in a more general sense, a ‘writing revolution’. It is now well established that the most concrete effects of this process became evident from the late 13th century, when the diffusion of writing attained an unprecedented ubiquity – unseen since the 5th and 6th centuries – and various European regions participated in a new, remarkable homogenization of writing practices, particularly in the documentary sphere. However, the reasons for its emergence, the ways in which it manifested, and the initial disparities between the different European contexts remain less clear. Following Clanchy, it has often been assumed that the driving force behind the change was the growth of state-like political entities, whether monarchies or city communes, and their needs for documentation and for complex apparatuses of social control. However, to my knowledge, this postulate has never been subjected to systematic empirical verification. More recently, scholars such as Paul Bertrand and Maureen Miller have refined the inquiry by emphasizing the need to consider broad chronological spans beyond the 12th and 13th centuries, in which the transformation becomes more apparent. Their approach involves examining the number of surviving documents as an indicator of changes not only in documentary production but also in archival and preservation practices. They also argue for the inclusion of ecclesiastical institutions alongside secular ones in this analysis.⁴

In the following pages, I intend to reflect on the origins of this shift – which for the sake of simplicity I will also refer to as the ‘documentary revolution’ – within a historical context that I know better than others: the city of Rome.⁵ The primary aim of this reflection is to contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon, both by reconstructing and interpreting it. In keeping the guiding framework of this conference, it also aims to shed light on a small yet somewhat unprecedented aspect of the multifaceted struc-

tures ordinaires (although in this case not depending directly on Maire Vigueur); Keller, “Zur Einführung;” Miller, “Reframing the ‘Documentary Revolution’.”

³ See Bousquet-Labouërie, et Destemberg, *Écrit, pouvoirs et société*, along with Haskins, *The Renaissance* and Witt, *The Two Latin Cultures*. For the definitions, see Bertrand, “À propos de la révolution de l’écrit” and *Les écritures ordinaires*; Miller, “Reframing the ‘Documentary Revolution’.”

⁴ Bertrand, “À propos de la révolution de l’écrit” and *Les écritures ordinaires*; Miller, “Reframing the ‘Documentary Revolution’.”

⁵ I revisit the interpretation put forward in Internullo, Bertrand, *Senato Sapiente*, 62-79, the implications of which are only briefly outlined there.

tural transformation that occurred in Italy – and more generally in Europe – between the 10th and 12th centuries. We have been asked to examine this aspect in order to grasp the possible connection between the various phenomena of the High Middle Ages, and, more broadly, the periodization of the age itself.

2. Documents in 10th-12th century Rome

Although the documentary contexts in which change is most perceptible in Italy undoubtedly belong to the secular public institutions of the 12th and 13th centuries, both in terms of the quantity and quality of documentation (registers) and in terms of preservation practices (new secular archives), a comprehensive assessment of the phenomenon requires consideration of the entire documentary system within a given context. The case of Rome is particularly well suited to a reflection that does not assume secular political institutions as agents of change, since, as is well known, the archive of its commune has completely disappeared, and between the 10th and 12th centuries the available documentation derives exclusively from the archives of urban and extra-urban ecclesiastical institutions.⁶

If the lower chronological limit is determined by the occasion of this conference, the upper limit for Rome is self-evident: documentation before the 10th century can be counted on the fingers of one hand, leaving a sample far too small to allow speculation about changes in the documentary system across a wider timespan. To be more specific, the material available for the period consists of just under 1,500 documentary texts, drawn from the loose parchments of twenty urban churches; from the cartularies of an urban monastery (SS. Andrea e Gregorio, 15th century) and two extra-urban monasteries (Farfa and Subiaco, early 12th century); and from a compilation preserved in the papal archive (the *Liber Censuum*, 1192). These texts were written mainly by *scriniarii Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae*, officers of the papal chancery or *Scrinium*, who between the 10th and 12th centuries came increasingly to dominate the landscape of ‘private’ writings previously managed by the ancient *tabelliones*, the notaries of late Roman tradition. From perspective of preservation, Rome thus appears entirely typical of Latin Europe, where ecclesiastical institutions were the chief agents of documentary transmission. As Chris Wickham has shown, this predominance was all the more necessary in Rome because, during the period in question, most urban and rural property – the primary concern of the the archival documents – belonged to the Church.⁷

⁶ A survey of the sources of medieval Rome in Carbonetti, Carocci, e Molinari, *Roma*, 79-167.

⁷ Carbonetti, “Il *Palatium* lateranense come risorsa;” Wickham, “*Iuris cui existens*” and “La struttura della proprietà fondiaria.” On ecclesiastical hegemony in the transmission of early medieval charters in Italy, see Cammarosano, *Italia medievale*, ch. 1.

To capture the changes in documentary practices, we must first evaluate the corpus from a quantitative perspective, and then examine it more closely from a qualitative standpoint.

3. *Growth, decline, explosion. Quantitative assessments*

The quantitative dimension is clearly illustrated by the graph in Figure 1, which I will now discuss. If we look at the documents preserved in ecclesiastical archives, we observe a steady increase from the 10th century until the mid-11th century, followed by a decline lasting until the second quarter of the 12th century, and then a renewed and a more rapid growth continuing to the end of that century. These numerical fluctuations are not neutral: they do not necessarily correspond to genuine periods of expansion or contraction in the city’s documentary life. To understand them, different evaluation parameters must be adopted depending on the material and contextual conditions that underlie them. I will therefore focus on these three phases, situating each within its specific context.

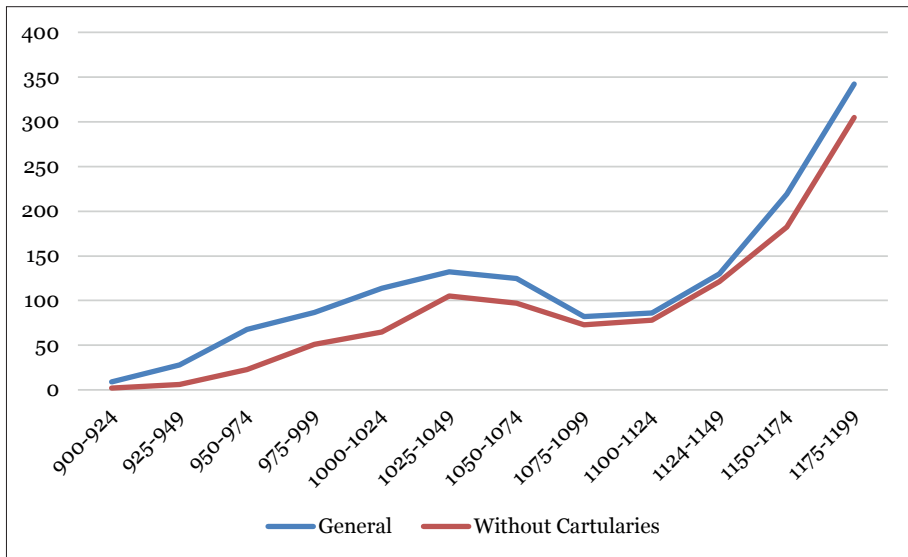


Fig. 1. Numerical variations in the consistency of preserved Roman archival documents. The vertical axis (ordinate) concerns the consistency expressed in intervals of fifty units, the horizontal axis (abscissa) instead marks the chronology on the basis of twenty-five years spans, from 900 to 1199. The blue line illustrates the total number of documents surveyed, while the red line excludes the documents preserved in cartularies that do not cover the entire period considered (*Regestum Farfense*, *Regestum Sublacense*, *Liber Censuum*).

1. As for the growth observed during the 10th and early 11th centuries (900-1049), it can be explained by two factors, one material and the other patrimonial. The material factor corresponds precisely to the transition from papyrus to parchment in most of the city's documentary practices by the mid-10th century. While papyrus has a notably poor rate of archival preservation, rarely lasting more than three centuries, parchment is far more durable and remains visible over the long term. The increase in documentation during the 10th century thus appears to be partly due to the shift from an 'invisible' medium, papyrus, to a more 'visible' one, parchment – a change that, in this respect, places Rome more in line with the cities of southern Italy, particularly those of the Tyrrhenian duchies (Gaeta, Naples, Amalfi), than with the cities of the *Regnum Italiae* (excluding Venice). The patrimonial factor, by contrast, concerns the fact that until the 10th century a large part of Rome's urban and rural landed property was under papal ownership. During this period, the pontiffs managed the land through the stipulation of (often temporary) emphyteutic contracts or by retaining direct control over certain significant estates, such as the *domuscultae*. From the mid-10th century onwards, however, by decision of the papacy itself (or of some aristocrats close to its court), a substantial portion of these assets was redistributed through perpetual transfers of ownership, formalized in papal privileges and donations, to ecclesiastical institutions such as churches, monasteries, and the bishoprics of the suburban dioceses. From that moment, the beneficiary institutions began to generate a more localized circulation of emphyteutic and leasehold rights, thereby stimulating the proliferation of documents within their archives. The documents most frequently found in 10th- and early 11th-centuries archival layers are, on the one hand, public and private donations and, on the other, emphyteutic contracts and leases (*libelli*). This means that until the 10th century the main repository for land documentation was the papal archive, which, for various reasons, survives only in small fragments within late compilations – the most important of which is the *Collectio canonum* of Deusdedit (c. 1080). In this sense, the apparent growth in the 10th century can also be explained by the fact that it was precisely during this period that the archives of the urban churches began to develop a more complex and articulated structure, following the perpetual transfers that fragmented the papal patrimony at a more local level. Rather than speaking of growth, I would characterize the 10th century as a period of increased visibility – both material and archival – for the urban ecclesiastical archives.⁸

2. As for the decline in the second half of the 11th century (1050-1124), I do not believe it is coincidental that it aligns exactly with the years of the

⁸ For the first aspect, see Carbonetti, "*Sicut inveni in thomo*;" Radiciotti, "Copie da papiro;" and Internullo, "Il papiro." For the second, see the previous note, to which one can add Lenzi, "Forme e funzioni," as well as the numerous documents cited in Deusdedit, *Collectio Canonum*, book III (as far as I know, the *Collectio* has been extensively mined by economic historians, but has so far received little attention in discussions of Roman archival practices).

'Church Reform'. In this respect, I believe that it was precisely the restructuring process of the papacy that curtailed the documentary practices that had developed up to that point. This was the period in which reformist intellectuals – building on certain tendencies already established in the preceding period – began to advance new public reflections on the harmfulness of certain written documents. The words below are those of Humbert, Cardinal Bishop of Selva Candida, an intellectual associated with the party of Nicholas II and the author of a treatise against simony (1057–60):

Through diabolical contracts, [the simoniacal bishop] sells, gives or permanently alienates to laymen, by whatever means or in whatever circumstances he can, even the tithes and gift of the living and of the dead until the end of the age, so that those who would serve God in future generations and work for his own and others' salvation of others find nothing left for themselves, not enough food for a single hour, nor clothing nor supplies for a single night. Thus [we have] lease contracts in secular hands, records of documents and the poorly secured instruments with the signatures of such people so that the ancient charters and canonical privileges of the churches of God are voided and every ecclesiastical possession is added to, and confirmed to, the jurisdiction of laymen. The decrees and privileges of the catholic pontiffs are unable to overcome the alienations of these heretics; none of the canons or synods of the holy fathers prevails, nor do the edicts and precepts of the emperors or the laws of religious princes stand in their way.⁹

It is worth emphasizing immediately that Humbert's ideas were not isolated but shared by numerous papal intellectuals active between the second half of the 11th century and the early decades of the 12th. Similar ideas can also be found in the writings of Deusdedit, who composed much of his *Collectio canonum* during the final years of Gregory VII's pontificate. It is also worth noting that both authors, as well as others who participated in the public debate of those decades, drew on earlier traditions. However, while such discourses were particularly influential within the *Regnum Italiae* proper, especially in the Ottonian period, they seem to have had little impact in Rome.¹⁰

⁹ Humbertus Cardinalis, *Adversus simoniacos*, 184: *Decimas enim et oblationes vivorum et defunctorum atque cunctos redditus, quos post se usque in finem saeculi Ecclesia erat habitura, per diabolicos contractus saecularibus hominibus vendit aut donat et, quibuscumque modis et conditionibus potest, perpetuo alienat, ut Deo post in futuris generationibus servituri suamque et aliorum salutem operaturi nichil omnino sibi relicta nec ad victum unius horae nec ad vestitum nec ad diversorium sub nocte inveniant. Inde libelli in saecularium manibus, inde diversa cartarum monimenta et instrumenta subscriptionibus talium male cauta, quibus evacuantur ecclesiarum Dei antiqua cyrographa et canonica privilegia; et iuri laicorum usque ad finem saeculi addicitur et confirmatur omnis possessio ecclesiastica. Nequeunt iam catholicorum pontificum decreta vel privilegia conscriptionibus horum hereticorum obviare, nequeunt ulli canones aut ullae synodi sanctorum patrum iam praevalere, nequeunt ulla edicta et praecepta imperatorum vel leges religiosorum principum iam obsistere* (the English translation here comes from Eldevik, *Episcopal Power and Ecclesiastical Reform*, 139. I learnt about this text from Lauwers, "Decima," 53–6).

¹⁰ See Deusdedit, *Collectio canonum*, 271–95. For the general debate in the late 11th and early 12th centuries, see Ciccopiedi, "Una fase del dibattito;" Vezzoni, "Libertas e res ecclesiae" with "La centralità." For the Ottonian age, see Nobili, "Vassalli su terra monastica;" Violante, "Fluidità del feudalesimo," especially with reference to the *Capitulare Ticinense de praediis eccle-*

The fact that much of the religio-political pamphleteering of the second half of the 11th century emphasizes *res ecclesiae* suggests that the documentary production of Roman ecclesiastical institutions – particularly emphyteusis and lease contracts – was subject to greater scrutiny during this period than in the past. The decline in documents in the second half of the century may partly reflect this increased attention. If we turn briefly to the typology of the preserved documents, we can see that the most significant decline concerns precisely the type of documents summarized below as ‘tenancy document(s)’ (Fig. 2). Immediately after these come donations, probably because the process of ecclesiastical reconfiguration of papal lands had already been completed (see above), while charitable donations by individuals expecting entry into a tenancy network – and thus an ecclesiastical clientele – in return, were diminishing.

The years of decline are also those in which Roman documentation reveals an emergence of a new practice: the *dicta* – a kind of proto-registers (or proto-*imbreviatura*) drafted and preserved by the *scriniarius*. These recorded legal acts in abbreviated yet legally valid textual forms, thereby avoiding and replacing the drafting of a parchment *in mundum* to be issued to the parties.¹¹ Since the spread of this practice shifted the focus of documentary activity beyond the ecclesiastical sphere, it seems clear that the decline under discussion can also be explained by the invisibility of these proto-registers, which were mostly preserved by the notary who composed them and not, as in the case of parchments *in mundum*, usually drawn up in duplicate, respectively for the churches and their tenants. Moreover, the shift in focus from churches to notaries may also reflect a social desire to avoid the surveillance of *res ecclesiae* during the period of the ‘Reform’ – a possibility that must for now remain hypothetical, yet one that should not be excluded, especially since among the first legal acts involved in the practice of *dicta* we already find leases and other forms of ecclesiastical land transfer.

3. The period from the second to the last quarter of the 12th century (1125-99) marks a reversal of the previous trend, with a significant increase in documentation. Since *dicta* continue to be abundantly attested, there can be little doubt that this increase – if not a veritable explosion – of documents preserved in the churches reflects a genuine growth in the overall volume of documentary production in the city. In my opinion, this is the true beginning

siarum (998), whose manuscript tradition – and, by extension, broader significance – would be worth investigating. In the meantime, see Vocino, West, “On the Life and Continence of Judges,” n. 29. For a comprehensive overview of the ‘Church Reform’, an excellent guide is now Mazel, *Nouvelle histoire*, vol. 2, 9-87.

¹¹ Pratesi, “I *dicta*,” Carbonetti, “*Dicta e imbreviature*,” Internullo, *Senato sapiente*, 75-6 (with a new interpretation of their earlier form). The earliest records of the practice date back to the 1060s and 1070s: Bartola, *Il regesto del monastero di SS. Andrea e Gregorio*, no. 15 (copy from *dicta* drafted in 1075); Fedele, *Carte del monastero dei SS. Cosma e Damiano*, no. 86 (copy from *dicta* drafted in 1078); Radiciotti, *Le pergamene di S. Maria in Trastevere*, no. 8 (copy from *dicta* drafted in 1079).

of the 'documentary revolution'. To fully understand it, it is now necessary to turn our attention to certain qualitative aspects of Roman documentation and its principal actors.

4. *Qualitative assessments: the 'rational' recomposition of a fractured system*

From a qualitative perspective, the Roman documentary system of the 10th century may be regarded as possessing a distinct *carattere originario*, in that its structure had already assumed a stable form, at least since the late 8th century. Its solidity also makes it relatively easy to describe. It can be envisioned as comprising two levels of documentation: one public and the other private.¹² The public level is mainly represented by the great papal privileges – *privilegia*, also known as 'bulls' because of their seal¹³ – which in Latium were the equivalent of the imperial diplomas of the *Regnum Italiae*. Drafted by *scriniarii*, they are generally found in ecclesiastical archives as guarantees of the perpetual transfer of large blocks of fiscal land, in this case papal land, or of other public rights. Alongside the privileges, we find judicial documentation in the form of memorative reports (*notitiae* or *brevia*), also drawn up by a *scriniarius* at the conclusion of the great judicial assemblies known as *placita*, presided over by the pope, the city prefect, and the Roman aristocrats. The private level, by contrast, consists mainly of temporary land transfers established on behalf of ecclesiastical institutions in the form of emphyteusis or leases, as well as of permanent transfers of property through donations, sales, and exchanges. These documents share not only a common formulaic framework but also the presence of autograph subscriptions or graphic symbols (*signa*) by witnesses, elements that were essential to the legal validity of the act. Once again, these documents were drafted by the same papal *scriniarii*, which is why the distinction between private and public documents in Rome presents a fundamental ambiguity: scholars have always classified emphyteutic and lease documents of ecclesiastical origin as private, yet perhaps it may be worth exploring further how this documentation – and, more broadly, the ecclesiastic property that generated it – was perceived by urban society.¹⁴ Finally, the picture should be completed with the 'lighter' documentation intended for internal use, such as survey lists (of landed estates or mov-

¹² I adopt here the 'classic' diplomatic distinction between public and private documents, based on the genetic process by which they were produced: see Pratesi, *Genesi e forme*, 34. For certain nuances between these two categories, see below. Obviously, the broader problem of document categorization cannot be addressed here owing to space limitations.

¹³ For *privilegia*, I here adopt the terminology used (and certainly produced and perpetuated by the *scriniarii* and *notarii*) in the documents themselves.

¹⁴ In this sense, the gradual occupation of the field of *tabelliones'* writings by the *scriniarii* might also be interpreted as a progressive expansion of the 'public' at the expense of the 'private'. Once again, however, the issue merits further investigation.

able goods) and papal epistolary registers, of which only scant traces survive in our archives.¹⁵

In the second half of the 11th century, this older system broke down, especially at the private level. Leases and emphyteuses not only dwindled in number, but gradually disappeared from the documentary landscape, replaced by a new contractual form of late Roman origin – the rental agreement (*locatio*) – which now encompassed social acts that had previously been poorly documented, perhaps because they had been relegated to the realm of oral tradition, such as those concerning vineyard cultivation. In addition to the rental agreement, new contractual types rooted in the Roman tradition appeared in the final decades of the 11th century, such as the pledge (*pignus*) and the counter-dowry (*donatio propter nuptias*). These were later joined, in the early 12th century, by the will (*testamentum*) and, in the middle years of the same century, by the feudal contract (*feudum*) and the receipt (*apocha*). Receipts were issued to tenants as proof of payment and were sometimes recorded in the owners' archives as "counter-receipts" (*antapochae*). More generally, we can observe a process of rationalization, by which the expansiveness and creativity of the preceding period – particularly visible in the rhetoric and convoluted formulae of *arenga* and *sanctio* of the 10th and 11th centuries – gave way to drier, standardized, and more rigid formulations; to smaller pieces of parchment, often trapezoidal in form; to scripts increasingly distant from the local type known as 'Roman curial' and closer to the 'diplomatic minuscule'; and to documentary texts in which the notary – now the undisputed agent responsible for the legal act – personally drafted even the subscriptions of the witnesses, who consequently lost their autography. At the same time, we can observe a growing articulation of the legal actions envisaged by scribal practice, as demonstrated by these newly mentioned types of contract. The central decades of the 12th century are a period in which the clients of a *scriniarius* had at their disposal a much broader range of legal instruments than in the past.¹⁶

If we cross-reference the qualitative data with the quantitative evidence, it is striking that the most intense phase of this new reconfiguration (1050-1125) coincides with the sharpest decrease in the number of preserved documents, immediately followed by the documentary 'explosion' of the late 12th

¹⁵ Carbonetti, "Il sistema documentario," 87-111. Lists of goods are often summarized in the *Liber Pontificalis* (whose 'first season' ends, however, at the close of the 9th century and resumes, even retrospectively, only in the 12th century). For papal lists whose text have come down to us directly, albeit in copy, see Tomei, "Il sale e la seta" and Internullo, "Sui beni pubblici." For epistolary registers, see generally Pagano, "I registri di lettere." These have survived only occasionally in intact (or nearly intact) copies before the end of the 12th century (Gregory the Great, John VIII, Gregory VII) but are mentioned frequently in Deusdedit, *Collectio Canonum*, 295-334, 374-84.

¹⁶ Carbonetti, "Il sistema documentario," 111-5; Lenzi, *La terra e il potere*, 101-49 (also on the oral tradition of certain socio-economic relations); Wickham, *Medieval Rome*, 366-75; Internullo, *Senato sapiente*, 73-9, 257-71.

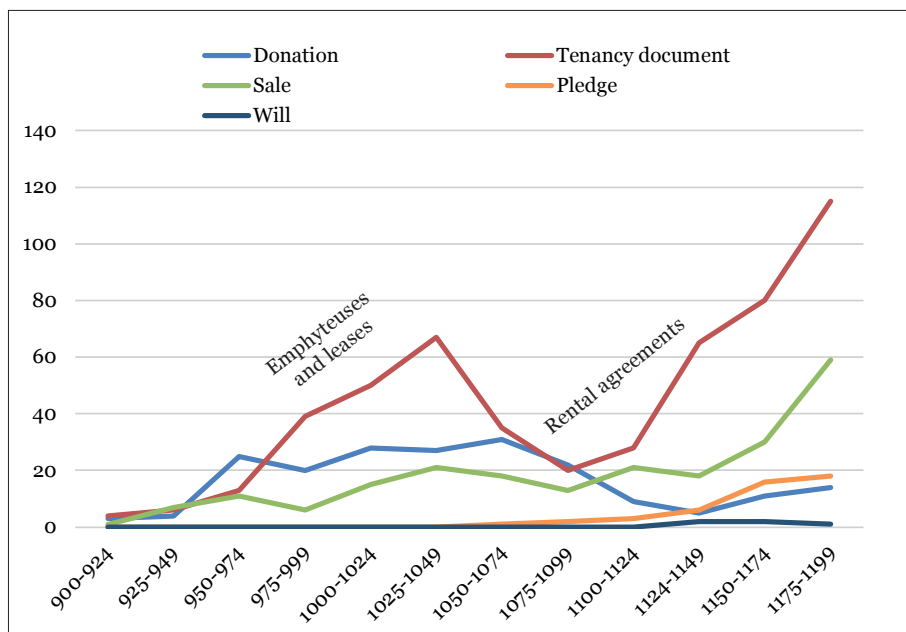


Fig. 2. Numerical variation, taken from the same *corpus*, according to some – but not all – documentary types.

century. Regarding this explosion, the graph in Fig. 2 highlights the takeoff of two specific types of documents – rental agreements and sales. Concerning rental agreements, I believe that their proliferation may be interpreted as a new impulse in the circulation of ecclesiastical lands, probably driven from ‘below’ by lay actors involved in processes of division, allotment, and building. This time, they seem to have encountered fewer obstacles in papal oversight: it must have been less stringent, given that the second half of the 12th century coincides with the period when, following the institutionalization of the commune in the 1140s, the pontiffs were absent from the city for several decades. As far as sales are concerned, which are also characterized by a high degree of lay participation, since they mainly concern rights of use and income derived from ecclesiastical properties, their expansion seems to indicate a progressive – albeit not definitive or abrupt – weakening of the ecclesiastical dominion over land. This can also be explained by the new legal measures introduced by the written *consuetudines* issued by the commune, attested from 1160 onwards.¹⁷ I would also add that, although this is the picture revealed by the surviving archives, to imagine the phenomenon in its fullest concreteness we must consider that this growth – in production even more than in preservation – affected all the new documentary forms. To put

¹⁷ Wickham, “*Iuris cui existens*,” 28-38; Internullo, “Dal caso alla regola.”

it simply, the fact that documents such as pledges, dowries, counter-dowries, loans, arbitrations, refutations, and receipts of payment mainly involved lay parties placed their circulation beyond the ecclesiastical radar, which remains our only available lens before the 13th century. If we possessed even a single complete example of *dicta*, I am convinced it would reveal all these newly listed forms, in a situation not far removed from that of the Genoese notarial *cartolari*, though certainly less centred on maritime trade. Indeed, between the second half of the 11th century and the first half of the 12th century, *dicta* must have been the most significant documentary innovation in urban society, primarily because these early registers represent both the driving force and the outcome of a shift in legal documentation from older ecclesiastical networks to emerging lay ones. Unfortunately, the surviving evidence allows us to glimpse this process only in rough outline, or to trace its furthest developments in the earliest notarial registers preserved from the mid-14th century.

It can therefore be argued that the foundations of the first real shift in medieval documentation in Rome – or, if we prefer, its documentary revolution – were laid between 1050 and 1150. I have already argued that the first major decline in documentation coincides with the years when reformist intellectuals promoted tighter surveillance over the *res ecclesiae* and their emphyteutic and leasehold circulation. Developing this line of argument, I would now emphasize that the entire process of reshaping the documentary system coincides with the years of the city's deepest political and judicial crisis, already vividly illustrated by Chris Wickham in his book on Rome.¹⁸ The convergence between the two sets of evidence is by no means coincidental: it is precisely this crisis that explains the dynamics outlined thus far. Between 900 and 1050, the city of Rome and its surrounding countryside, though occasionally shaken, were still contained within a political system characterized by relative stability: public authority was always formally attributed to the pope and his officers; justice was administered through the great *placitum* assembly; landed property largely belonged to the churches; and the social prestige of the laity derived above all from its proximity to the papacy and the ecclesiastical institutions. After the imperial intervention of the 1040s, the disruptions caused by simultaneous papal elections, and the new reformist demands, that older system collapsed within a few decades. The void created by this collapse paved the way for various forms of experimentation – initially more confused and contingent, but from the 1120s to the 1140s increasingly structured and deliberate. For the purposes of this discussion, the most important outcome of this process of recomposition was the professional reconfiguration of the *scriniarii* and, alongside them, the legal experts known as *iudices*. Until the collapse of the old system, *scriniarii* and *iudices* had maintained an officer-like connection with the papacy. Between 1080 and 1120, however, they lost this connection as a result of the clericalization of the new papal *curia*,

¹⁸ Wickham, *Medieval Rome*, ch. 7.

which increasingly involved the college of cardinals and favoured the entry of documentary forces from outside the city into the papal chancery. The Lateran did not disappear from the horizon of the two groups, which continued to be trained within papal circles and to draw cultural nourishment from that environment (through manuscripts, formularies, educational paths, and ceremonial knowledge). Nevertheless, the loss of direct papal affiliation meant that, from a professional point of view, the *scriniarii* and *iudices* had to address the needs of urban society much more than in the past, welcoming new recruits into their ranks and, above all, solidifying the connection between legal expertise and the demands of lay groups – one of the constitutive elements in the genetic process of the Roman commune and its institutionalization, completed in the years 1143–9.¹⁹

I believe that illustrating these processes helps clarify both the reasons and the mechanisms behind the documentary transformation. The acquisition of social and cultural centrality by the *scriniarius* – what we might otherwise describe as the *fides publica* – can indeed be understood as a response to the disappearance of the *placitum* assembly, which in the old system had served as the point of equilibrium in relations between churches, with their land, and the lay tenants who held them through emphyteuses and leases. The centrality of the notary was not, however, simply an unconditional response to the crisis. If the *placitum*, with the hierarchical order of its assemblies, had contributed to reifying a society dominated by aristocrats, the *habitus* of the post-*placitum* *scriniarius* as a professional undoubtedly stimulated and facilitated the expansion of documentary culture throughout society. The fact that the *scriniarii* had – and continued to have – access to the rich cultural environment of the Lateran explains well the proliferation of new documentary forms between the second half of the 11th century and the first half of the 12th. We now know with certainty that some of the most important legal manuscripts with Justinian's law known in Europe originated from the Lateran deposits. It was also from these deposits that Cardinal Deusdedit, around 1080, obtained the same Justinian texts, together with other papal documents – a corpus which, taken as a whole, provides abundant material on pledges, counter-dowries, wills, and receipts.²⁰ From an economic perspective, the transfor-

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of this process, see Wickham, *Sleepwalking*, ch. 4 and Internullo, *Senato sapiente*, ch. 3. It should also be noted that, although the commune became a new centre of aggregation for the inhabitants' demand for justice (and documentation), the *scriniarii* remained, throughout the late Middle Ages, the pivotal figures of extrajudicial practice – the 'everyday' face of late medieval justice.

²⁰ Ammirati, "Il paratesto" and Loschiavo, "Was Rome still a Centre;" Deusdedit, *Collectio canonum*, 321 (receipts), 339–46 (Justinian texts). It is worth noting that the formulary of the Gelasian receipts transcribed in the *Collectio canonum* bears a striking resemblance to the payment receipts found scattered across various types of erratic supports in the 12th century, which I interpret as 'counter-receipts' (*antapochae*): see Carbonetti, *Scrivere* and Internullo, *Senato sapiente*, 270–1, for details. References to *apochae* and *antapochae* are also found in southern Italy during the Swabian period: see von Falkenhausen, e Amelotti, *Notariato e documento*, 20–1. I will develop these connections elsewhere.

mation can be observed in the following way: once the old system collapsed, between 1060 and 1120, notaries sought both to diversify their documentary repertoire – drawing on the resources of the Lateran – and to address their services to lay society far more than in the past. In turn, between 1120 and 1150, lay society became increasingly familiar with this new offer, intensifying its demand for documentation and, between 1150 and 1200, driving the takeoff in documentary production. The austerity of the formulae, the reduced size, and the trapezoidal shape of 12th-century parchments may appear to be purely technical matters, but they are in fact the archaeological traces of this connection between notarial offer and social demand for writing. Faced with a limited supply of sheepskin parchment, notaries – or, if not notaries, the sellers of skins for documentary use – were compelled to use their writing material more rationally: reducing dimensions, including the extremities of the animal in the cut, and economizing on words. Not surprisingly, this is also the period in which preserved documents more frequently contain references to payments made to the notary for drafting the deed.²¹

5. *Concluding thoughts*

In this final section, I intend to develop the argument along two lines: one comparative and the other methodological. These concern the following questions: is the case of Rome representative of a broader Italian and European context? And what are the methodological implications of the documentary revolution for the study of medieval history? I will address the first question in greater detail and the second more succinctly.

The first question undoubtedly admits a positive answer, at least in general terms. As I noted at the beginning of this study, there is unanimous agreement among scholars today in viewing the documentary revolution as a Europe-wide phenomenon spanning the 12th to 14th centuries. A survey of the available research suggests that one of the most enduring effects of this process, between the 12th and 13th centuries, was a marked homogenization of legal and political languages, owing to the fact that notaries were often recruited as officers within state chanceries. This holds true from a general perspective. However, when we delve into the specifics, the picture becomes more complex, for scholars have shown less interest in grasping the details of the great transition from the high-medieval to the late-medieval documentary systems. When reading books that address not only diplomatic and historical-cultural topics, but also economic and political ones, it is quite easy to come across one, two, or even more elements of novelty described in the preceding pages: a larger number of preserved documents, the prominent role of notaries, the absorption of Roman law upon a foundation of legal particu-

²¹ Internullo, *Senato sapiente*, 75-8 (also on the use of sheepskin), 241.

larisms, a greater variety of legal acts, notaries with an economic and rational mindset, and so forth. However, there have been few attempts to trace the qualitative and quantitative transformations of entire documentary systems from the 10th to the 12th century, or even across the broader divide between the early and later Middle Ages. Examining individual elements of novelty across multiple case studies can be misleading, especially because a single element, in itself, neither constitutes nor reveals a system.²² Instead, it seems more useful to compare my research with studies that have approached the same problems, albeit in different ways. From this perspective, I believe that a good litmus test is provided by Enrico Faini's studies on Florence and, beyond Italy, by Michel Zimmermann's work on Catalonia.

Let us begin with Florence. Drawing on a corpus of some 5,000 parchments dating from the 10th to the 12th centuries, Faini has identified an intriguing documentary curve: a peak in the second half of the 11th century, a decline in the first decade of the 12th century, and a new peak at the end of that same century. Typologically, while the 11th century is marked by the prominence of donations and leases, the 12th century is characterized by an initial explosion of *brevia* – a generic form encompassing a wide range of legal actions – and, especially in the final decades, by the predominance of sales. In the central decades of the 12th century, references also begin to appear to early notarial registers, which, according to Faini, partly explain the numerical decline of documents during those years. Comparing the Florentine case with that of Rome, it is striking that, although Florence follows a similar pattern (growth-decline-growth), its chronology appears to be shifted forward by about half a century. How can this chronological difference be explained? Perhaps by the fact that, in the Tuscan case, the collapse of the high-medieval political system represented by the March of Tuscany occurred several decades than the collapse of the papal system in Rome – specifically, at the beginning of the 12th century. It is also noteworthy that the endpoint of these developments was the same in both contexts: even in Florence, the close of the 12th century was marked by an increasingly dense interaction between the economic needs of society and the professionalization of notaries. In this regard, Faini notes that this encounter facilitated the emergence, alongside the land market *stricto sensu*, of a parallel market for rents and usage rights – an outcome that can also be seen as a product of the high levels of legal abstraction reached by notarial practice.²³

²² Among the numerous and valuable studies carried out by Attilio Bartoli Langeli, one in particular deserves mention: his research on Raniero da Perugia, the notary who, at the end of the 12th century, was in the habit of recording the number of lines in his deeds using the new Indo-Arabic numerals. According to Bartoli Langeli, this practice represented an additional – and certainly experimental – means of giving the deeds both personal and professional distinctiveness. I fully agree with this interpretation, but I would also add that, in light of the spread of payment notes for notaries in Rome at the end of the 12th century, such numbering may have served Raniero to calculate the economic value of his work. See Bartoli Langeli, *Notai*, 87–108.

²³ Faini, "Le fonti diplomatistiche" and "Prima del fiorino," who values Huertas' studies on Pistoia, especially *La rente foncière* and "Between Law and Economy."

Catalonia, then. Although Zimmermann does not offer quantitative assessments, in his study of the 9th to 12th centuries he identifies qualitative transformations strikingly similar to those observed in Rome: a period marked by great variety and formulaic experimentation is followed, between the 11th and 12th century, by one of recomposition that culminates in what he calls the “normalization of the diplomatic instrument”. The written document acquired regularity, homogeneity, and conciseness; the clergy were gradually excluded from documentary culture, which, according to Zimmermann, was ultimately “confiscated” by a group of notaries increasingly imbued with Roman law and ever more clearly defined in corporate and professional terms. The first major breaking point can be located in the central decades of the 11th century (1020–60), precisely when the old structures of Carolingian origin entered into crisis – a process already reconstructed by Pierre Bonnassie. Michel Zimmermann himself described the 11th century as the “golden age of *convenientiae*”, contracts in which two parties reached agreement without the intervention of either public or private jurisdiction.²⁴

The comparison provides several insights that are useful for reflection on a broader scale. First and foremost, it seems to confirm that documentary change was closely linked to the crisis of early medieval public institutions. From this perspective, the cases discussed here seem to contribute something important to our understanding of the documentary revolution, for they significantly weaken the idea that it was the political recomposition processes of the late 12th and 13th-century that generated it. These processes were certainly significant, and in some areas, such as southern Italy, they were crucial to the transition from early medieval particularism to late medieval homogeneity. However, they do not account for the change everywhere. In Rome and in some other areas, the documentary transformation itself appears to have functioned as a process of recomposition following political crisis. It is equally noteworthy that downstream, the endpoints of the process are remarkably similar even across thousands of kilometers. In this case, I believe the answer lies in the progressive intensification of communication radiating outwards from each urban – or rural – centre, a dynamic that might well be described as interregional connection. As Chris Wickham has recently demonstrated, the second half of the 12th century was precisely the moment when the economies of the Mediterranean regions – including central and northern Italy – became increasingly interconnected, growing in complexity and thereby fostering a new phase of long-distance and more intensive exchange.²⁵ The homogenization of documentary practices

²⁴ Zimmermann, *Écrire et lire en Catalogne*, 112, together with Bonnassie, *La Catalogne*. Regarding the *convenientiae* of Catalonia in the 11th and 12th centuries, see also Kosto, *Making Agreement*, who likewise notes (p. 16) that Catalan documents number approximately 5,000 in the 10th century and around 10,000 in the 11th. The European picture will soon be enriched by the forthcoming studies of Didier Panfili on Languedoc, which, among other topics, also address several of the issues raised in this essay.

²⁵ Wickham, *The Donkey and the Boat*.

may be seen as the cultural counterpart of this intensification, in the following sense: for communications between different contexts to proceed smoothly, each context must equip itself with tools that are intelligible to its interlocutors. It is no coincidence, I believe, that it was precisely in the 12th century that the cities of central and northern Italy definitively abandoned their early medieval cultural particularisms, adopting standardized forms of diplomatic minuscule – i.e. the Caroline minuscule adapted for documentary use. The main vehicles of this homogenization were probably treaties, which were drafted in multiple copies for preservation in the archives of the contracting parties, and letters, which, although poorly preserved, were certainly instrumental – thanks to the *ars dictandi* – in promoting the homogenization of Europe's political language in the 12th and 13th centuries, as Benoît Grévin has shown. The end of the phenomenon known to paleographers as 'early medieval graphic particularism' can probably be explained in these terms: a shared intention among all the parties involved to employ forms of communication that could be understood across an increasingly broad communicative range. It is perhaps for this reason that the protagonists of Rome's documentary culture, as they projected themselves ever more outwards, gradually abandoned their early medieval, Byzantine-based script – the 'Roman curial' – and replaced it with the clearer Caroline forms. The *scriniarii* adopted these first, in the late 11th century, in imitation of the autograph subscriptions of witnesses in their charters – once they decided to forego autography – and later, in the 12th century, for documents issued by the commune of Rome, including treaties and letters addressed to subjects outside the city. Finally, between the 13th and 14th centuries, these forms came to be used for all other types of documents.²⁶

I conclude these pages with a brief reflection on the methodological implications of the documentary revolution, particularly with regard to questions of periodization. I believe that the transformation under discussion constitutes a genuine break with the preceding period and should be considered one of the key elements for framing the High Middle Ages and its periodizing value. In considering the heuristic consequences, namely the implications of this historical phenomenon for the research parameters employed by scholars, I find it useful to draw a parallel with another transformation recently examined by archaeologists: between the 11th and 12th centuries, Rome, and probably many other cities, expanded in volume to such an extent that a sub-

²⁶ On the *dictamen*, see Grévin, *Rhétorique du pouvoir médiéval*, which clearly demonstrates that the standardization of the political language of European chanceries (monarchical, communal, and seignorial) was facilitated by the intensity of contact between *dictatores*, as well as by the widespread circulation of these individuals, along with manuscripts containing epistolary models. It does not appear that the treaties have yet been studied from the perspective proposed here. For Rome, see Internullo, *Senato sapiente*, 284-5, 288-90; there are, however, several other documents involving both cities and lords of Latium: see, for example, Falco, *Documenti inediti*, no. 3, concerning Corneto. Further developments of this phenomenon can be observed in the chancery minuscule scripts (so-called *minuscole cancelleresche*) of the late 13th and 14th centuries.

stantial part of the ancient and early medieval urban fabric was buried.²⁷ Given this parallelism, scholars working on the 5th-11th centuries necessarily operate with different parameters from those applied by scholars investigating the 12th-15th centuries. For the period preceding the documentary revolution and the volumetric expansion of cities, when written records were limited and many traces of human activity now lie buried underground, the most useful research methodologies are philology and diplomatics for written sources, and archaeology for material ones. For the subsequent period, however, when written sources multiplied exponentially and human traces – buildings, in particular – are often visible above ground, it becomes necessary, if not to replace, at least to complement these approaches with methods that allow for the ‘serial’ treatment of documents, drawing on statistics and other social sciences, as well as with a more practised eye towards architectural history. This methodological diversity is one of the factors that justify the distinction between early/high medievalists and late medievalists. It also clarifies why the former are more likely to engage with historians of Antiquity, while the latter are more likely to interact with modern and contemporary historians. Of course, I am not suggesting that the research of early medievalists and late medievalists should remain separate. On the contrary, I believe that making these methodological differences explicit is the essential starting point for a more fruitful dialogue.

A final observation concerns the inherent periodizing value of the transformation. The documentary revolution was likely accompanied by a shift in mentality: whereas before the 12th century individuals may have regarded the act of documenting a legal transaction as incidental to the action itself, thereafter they came to see it as essential, or at least *more essential* than before. As Paul Bertrand has aptly observed, according to this new mindset, “the juridical action existed only because it had been put into writing”.²⁸ Clearly, this statement can be nuanced if we examine the late Middle Ages through the eyes of a Renaissance scholar, or a modern or contemporary historian, since society’s familiarity with writing would continue to evolve over time. Yet, it retains its full force if we observe the 12th-15th centuries from the perspective of the early Middle Ages: there is indeed a considerable distance between the urban societies of the 13th century, in which notaries were visited daily and entire populations were increasingly ‘enclosed’ in public registers and lists, and those of the 8th-11th centuries, where the relationship between writing and society followed a slower and less pervasive rhythm.²⁹ Compared with the

²⁷ See Manacorda, *Roma*, and Augenti in this volume.

²⁸ Bertrand, *Les écritures ordinaires*, 50. I quote here from the English translation: “From the thirteenth century on (...) for reasons and in ways already mentioned, here as elsewhere, the written document validated and henceforth authenticated the juridical action it recorded. The document and the juridical action were superimposed on each other, or at least identified each other. The juridical action existed only because it had been put into writing”.

²⁹ For the process of ‘written registration’ of urban society between the 13th and 14th centuries, see now Vallerani, *Regimi di cittadinanza*, 23-48. For further – and considerable – articulation

practices of the 13th century, then, the phenomenon described here can really be interpreted as a point of departure – one all the more interesting because it was, to some extent, triggered from below, i.e. by the relationship between notaries, society, and property.

In more philosophical terms, we could interpret this process as a new manifestation of *documentality*, as theorized by Maurizio Ferraris. According to the philosopher, “nothing social exists outside the text”, where *text* should be understood as the recording – not necessarily written, but at least preserved in memory – of a relationship that establishes, at a given moment, the reciprocal commitment of two or more individuals. Reasoning along these lines, and considering that in the early Middle Ages social relations were more often recorded in memory without resorting to writing – thanks in part to ceremonial structures such as the *placitum* assembly – the documentary revolution may also be interpreted as a new ‘writing turn of documentality’.³⁰

of written communication between the late 14th and 16th centuries, see at least Lazzarini, *L'ordine delle scritture* (with further bibliography).

³⁰ Ferraris, *Documentalità*, *passim*. This reflection is indebted to the works of Paolo Tomei and Simone Collavini, notably “Beni fiscali e ‘scritturazione,’” but see also Collavini’s essay in this same volume.

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