“Female household heads filled the poorest urban classes,” as David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber explained in *Tuscans and Their Families.* These female household owners were women who had been widowed and left in a precarious spot in society. Yet, there is also evidence that shows that upper class widows faced a different dilemma: the option to remarry or to maintain the property that they received from their late husbands. By focusing on the widows in Florence, Italy as shown in both the Florentine *Catasto* of 1427 and the *Decima Granducale* of 1561, it is possible to analyze the different experiences that these widows had across class lines. By identifying these widows, the importance of using census data, and the application of both to the realities of widows in the Early Modern period, there can be conclusions drawn to explain the importance that property had for widows and to utilize this subject to show the importance of historical analysis and spatial placement to better understand and show the larger historical narrative.

Identifying Widows

Widows in Early Modern Italian society were a prevalent, but highly ignored group of the population due to their lack of inclusion in public affairs and in recordkeeping. They offer insight into the roles that women played when they were no longer under the control of a man, though in some situations they did inhabit with their sons or brothers, which reveals a bit about the functioning of women in Italian society. By researching the roles of widows and their experiences, there is the opportunity to understand social and cultural expectations of this population. By utilizing mainly census sources, the ability for quantifiable data to combine with qualitative information to create a fuller image of women in the Italian Early Modern period (1300-1650s). By focusing solely upon the period extending from 1427-1562, there is an possibility to analyze not only the ways in which widows were counted and annotated in Italian history, but also their social importance and roles.

The logical first identification is to discuss is who these widows were. Generally speaking, “women in Early Modern society lived longer than men.” This was generally due to women being younger than men when first married, in order to maximize the activity of their child bearing years. Men were older when first married, which was a consequence of the fact they were expected to reach a level of status and prove the ability to provide for a family before

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1 This digital project is currently available at http://arcg.is/1XirnAN.
they could marry.\textsuperscript{4} Generally, men were much more likely to delay marriage in order to secure their financial independence, rather than being burdened with a wife and children.\textsuperscript{5} With marriages lasting on average about 16-20 years, the wife was likely to be the survivor.\textsuperscript{6} The woman was also “the partner less likely to remarry, any society was apt to carry a far greater proportion of widows than it did of widowers.”\textsuperscript{7}

This is the main point of interest in looking at widows. Women in society were always under the protection and leadership of a male: fathers, brothers, husbands, or priests. Yet, when widowed, these women became breadwinning entities in their own right, left alone to live in society and to support and lead their households. Even with this contrast from traditional wives to widows, it was not often that widows were viewed as an abnormality to society. Rather, in most cases “the widow was a familiar and to a degree acceptable member of society whom all acknowledged should be recognized, provided she behaved as society deemed appropriate.”\textsuperscript{8} The general thought about widows being on their own was that “she had married, as conventions insisted that she should, but God had taken her partner, a personal tragedy for which she was in no way to blame.”\textsuperscript{9} In this situation, there was an understanding in society that someone would need to care for the household, even if it was the widow and not a traditionally male figure.

The main focus of this research project is on widows that were past the age of remarriage and childbearing. They had fulfilled their duties as women and wives to society, and now were in a situation where they both belonged and did not belong. Women were faced with moving locations, finding sources of income, and weighing the options of living with family or on their own. All of these issues bring to light the struggles of widowhood, but also of their experiences and how these women influenced their society. The main struggles that will be focused on will be the lower class widows, as they presented more issues socially and economically. The purpose of this study is to examine a relatively under-studied group in Renaissance Italy. By looking at the impact that these women had upon Early Modern Italian society and how their economic status altered after the loss of their husbands, it is possible to draw conclusions about the culture and economics of Early Modern Italy and how widows factored into the larger society.

In looking to explain the influence that widows had upon Italian society in the Early Modern period as well as their experience in general, there are three main questions that will be answered in this study:

- How many widows owned property or rented property and what does this suggest about their social status and economic power as owner-occupants, renters, or landlords?
- How many widows inhabited multi-family houses and what does this mean for the functions of the family, as well as widows’ economic status?
- Does the census data show spatial proximity indicating ties between households led by widows with the same surname?

\textsuperscript{4} Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, \textit{Tuscans and Their Families}, 211.
\textsuperscript{5} Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, \textit{Tuscans and Their Families}, 211.
\textsuperscript{6} Hufton, \textit{The Prospect before Her}, 223.
\textsuperscript{7} Hufton, \textit{The Prospect before Her}, 223.
\textsuperscript{8} Hufton, \textit{The Prospect before Her}, 225.
\textsuperscript{9} Hufton, \textit{The Prospect before Her}, 225.
By focusing on these specific questions, there is the opportunity to look at the economic status of women, the expectations that males of a family were to play in regards to a widowed mother or sister, and the extent that census data can aid understanding widows and their place in society.

Sources and their Availability

The 1427 *Catasto* of Florence, Italy was a “fiscal record, created out of the monetary needs of the Florentine commune.”\(^{10}\) Due to frequent “plague, war, financial crashes, and acute demographic decline,” there was a desire by the state of Florence to assess the principal wealth that was held by citizens and those in the rural countryside of Florence by.\(^{11}\) Besides collecting this data for taxing purposes, there was also the creation of a record document the geographic spread of the city’s inhabitants. By noting members of their households, relationships of the family, their financial income and net worth, as well as other notes about location and servants or hired help there was a full listing of those within the city’s limits and surrounding areas. The *Catasto* also details “movable and immovable possessions,” meaning both monetary wealth shown through material items and immovable items such as houses and property, which was the main basis for applying taxes in this period.\(^{12}\) This record provides an economic and social blueprint for the city in 1427, as well as an opportunity to evaluate the different relationships and social interactions that appeared throughout the city.

In 1978, David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber produced *Les Toucans et leurs familles: Un étude du catasto Florentin de 1427*, which was a full examination of the Florentine *Catasto*. Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber focused on history and technical characteristics of the tax census, but edited their research down for the English translation of the book in order to reach a wider audience.\(^{13}\) This examination was one of the first models of historical preparation and analysis of quantitative data. The *Catasto* is a data set that “captures about 60,000 households, and it enumerates more than 260,000 persons.”\(^{14}\) This massive data set allows much larger discoveries when combined with the historical context of Florence in this period. Although not intended to be more than an economic snapshot of the city, the *Catasto* provides the “economic activities and the demographic characteristics of an entire region” that lead to discovering the “spatial, social, temporal, and culture” of Florence.\(^{15}\)

For this study, the main area of interest is in the marital relationships that are noted in Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber’s findings, which allow a focus upon widows and their economic status. With the online publishing of Herlihy’s computer records in 1991, a database has been

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created to allow the searching of the *Catasto*. By using the search feature, the data can be separated out to show only registered widows in 1427 and their locations, relationships, financial security, and economic activities. This online resource is incredibly valuable in opening up the source material to a worldwide audience rather than it being maintained in the *Archivio di Stato* in Florence. The online version, much like *Tuscans and their Families*, has been translated for an English-speaking audience.

Similarly the to the *Catasto*, Florence again had another survey taken in 1561 by Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici. The *Decima* was a “mode of taxation introduced in 1495 with the restoration of republican governmental forms following the death of Lorenzo de’ Medici and the expulsion of his heirs.” This form of taxation declared that only “the income on immovable property should be subject to levy,” and that this tax would not be based on “total capital wherever it was found, as the earlier *Catasto* had been.” Rather the *Decima* would be a direct tax upon the income raised from real assets. This was the original form of the *Decima* that then led to Duke Cosimo I’s reformed taxation record.

In 1560, Cosimo I expanded the purpose of the *Decima*. With the combination of multiple magistracies under his control, Cosimo decided to have the *Decima* note the locations, families, and income levels of each household within the city. By sending scribes door to door to document the four quarters of Florence, Cosimo was able to give a much fuller picture of who was in the city, what their taxation levels should be, and what the demographic makeup of his city was. Unlike the early *Decima*, Cosimo’s *Decima Granducale* offers a much larger picture of all aspects of Florentine life in 1561-62, by providing entries that include marriages and marriage dates, number of children, other members living in the house, the exact street location of the house, the owner of the property and any rent due, and the occupations of those living in the house, along with their income. This offers a much fuller image of Florence than the *Catasto*, but it is due partially to the fact that this census was taken for different reasons than determining taxation to aid the failing Italian treasury. The economic system was not the only reason for conducting the *Decima*, but also Cosimo’s attempt to have a full record of his city.

Much like the *Catasto*, the *Decima Granducale* records are stored within Florence’s *Archivio di Stato* and are in Italian, making is difficult for the general public to access it. However, Nicholas Terpstra, a professor at the University of Toronto, and a team of PhD candidates, including Colin Rose, a PhD candidate with a focus on Early Modern Italy, decided to take on the transcription of the *Decima Granducale* and make it available, much like Herlihy’s files on the *Catasto*. Beyond this transcription of all the *Decima* entries, there was a further goal of this team: to spatially consider and map the entries upon a 1584 Buonsignori map of Florence. By utilizing GIS mapping software and real geospatial correction processes, there is now an interactive interface to the map, allowing one to search and see the locations of members of

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Florentine society. Thus, the DECIMA (Digitally Encoded Census Information and Mapping Archive) Project offers a new opportunity to visually and spatially understand data sets.

This project is relatively new. With the creation of the GIS map and website in 2014 and the publication of their findings in *Modern Space, Sense and Movement in Florence: Historical GIS and the Early Modern City* in 2016, there are some gaps in the availability of the information. Although the data has been transcribed and organized into worksheets much like the *Catasto*, it is not yet available to be searched in the same way, seeing that the full spreadsheet of data has not been published online.\(^{19}\)

While there is a search function in the DECIMA GIS portal that allows for names, occupations, members in a household, and other fields to be searched, the query only returns the top 50 results. When zoomed into a particular area, however, the results change with the viewable space. This makes it difficult to locate exactly how many households fall into a particular category if there are more than 50 entries that apply. Also, the whole map is not accessible online yet, but the S. Maria Novello quarter is fully available and searchable, allowing for overlays of roads, specific entries, and a coloring of the full quarter to appear. With the publication of the book in March, there is the expectation that the DECIMA team will make available the rest of the map.

**Widows and Property**

One of the more interesting issues that faced societies and widowhood was the owning of property. Generally only men had the ability to maintain property in their own right, with women needing a male guardian in order to hold their own property and it was then successively passed through the patrilineal line. In the specific case of Florence, children were also considered as part of the husband’s property and, if they were young enough, they did not share custody with their mothers. So when a husband died and willed his property to his wife, or she inherited it from her father due to a lack of sons, she was placed in a separate sphere from other women.\(^{20}\)

As has been noted, widows in general occupied a difficult space in society. They had fulfilled their roles as wives and mothers and without a husband they were required to provide a living for themselves. It is interesting to note that, “only when, as widows, they assumed control over their own household do their movements achieve visibility. Economic difficulties often followed hard upon the death of the breadwinner,” forcing women to take up occupations outside of their own homes.\(^{21}\)

In order to better understand these women renting out properties and owning properties in their own right, unlike similar practices by men who had property, there needs to be an explanation as to how common these female heads of household were. In Florence, about 10% of

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\(^{19}\) To see more about the transcription and translation process of the *Decima*, see [http://decima.chass.utoronto.ca/method/](http://decima.chass.utoronto.ca/method/) and Terpstra and Rose, *Modern Space*, 60.


women were recognized as heads of household, with 90% of this group being older widows.\textsuperscript{22} With such a large amount of widows, there is some conception that perhaps these widows would be able to receive property from their husband’s will or live bearably after obtaining a job outside of the home. Unfortunately, the older a widowed woman was, the more likely she had little to no economic independence. In fact, it can “be assumed that female households were among the poorest in Renaissance Florence.”\textsuperscript{23}

In understanding that these females left on their own did not have a great economic success, there can be a hypothesis that only those of privilege would have property that they could make income off of. There certainly were levels of economic success, ranging from wealthy upper class, to moderate artisan classes, and then the poorest, either widows of a low-ranking guild or one left without any support from her late husband’s work. The making of income required, generally, that the women were able to inherit property from their parents or husband, or there were no viable heirs to pass a late husband’s property to. There was also the possibility that a woman would be able to purchase her own land. Sometimes the property was noted and included in the dowry of a woman, which she would receive back after the marriage had ended. Rental properties could be a source of constant income, depending upon their location and the people inhabiting the property. These renters paid a specified amount per pay period to the owner. This was not the only use for property, however; there is proof of women using their wills to donate rented properties to nunneries, as well as their abilities to maintain their own properties.\textsuperscript{24}

Diane Huges has remarked that “[a]ristocratic women come of age at widowhood.”\textsuperscript{25} Although she was referencing widows in Genoa, this phrase certainly holds true when looking at women in Florence as well. As widows, Florentine women “could exercise considerable control over property.”\textsuperscript{26} This partially stems from wealthier women having larger dowries that they could bequeath, but also the opportunities that these women had to earn income on properties that were sometimes a part of their dowries.\textsuperscript{27} This also meant that these women had a large say in how their land was divided up after their deaths. The maintenance of this commercial capital and raising income based upon the renting of these properties offered upper class widows some economic cushion after their husband’s death.

Many different people in the city could rent these properties, but the interesting crossover is to look at the widows who were renting from other widows. These lower class women were now the heads of their households, but were generally at the bottom run of society. In Florence, widows made up “a quarter of those without profession, and the proportion was even higher, up to 32% in the secondary towns.”\textsuperscript{28} This creates some alleviation to this statistic. Some

\textsuperscript{22} Judith Brown and Robert Davis, \textit{Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy} (London: Longman, 1998), 111, 119.
\textsuperscript{23} Brown and Davis, \textit{Gender and Society}, 119.
\textsuperscript{24} Hufton, \textit{The Prospect before Her}, 225.
\textsuperscript{25} Brown and Davis, \textit{Gender and Society}, 33.
\textsuperscript{26} Brown and Davis, \textit{Gender and Society}, 33.
\textsuperscript{27} Brown and Davis, \textit{Gender and Society}, 33.
\textsuperscript{28} Herlihy and Klapish-Zuber, \textit{Tuscans and Their Families}, 124.
of the upper class women did not have a profession to list for the *Catasto*, but they were making taxable money off of their properties. Although there were many instances of struggling widows in Florence, there were certainly some that were able to use their properties to maintain a source of money to survive upon.

Owning property was certainly an economic option for widows during the Early Modern period in Florence. The provided a constant stream of money from renters in the city after the initial purchase (or inheritance) and helped these widows to maintain their lifestyle. However, there certainly were widows that did not own property and who were not afforded the same status and income, especially if they were older.

Generally, widowed heads of households were of the poorest in Florence, as well as across Europe. As women became independent at older ages “even if they managed to stabilize their holdings when they had fewer children to care for, they, nonetheless, remain on average considerably poorer that men of the same age and they are destined inevitably for destitution in their final years.”

This was mainly due to the fact that men would have trained in a skill and would have already been in the workforce, while women were generally in the home and not working in the same way. With this possibility in mind, younger widows would attempt to remarry as soon as possible, while older widows would look to their children and other family members to live with and offer support for the remainder of their lives.

The population of widows is one that was unnerving to the rulers and government of Florence for the main reason that “women alone, in some command of money and assets or others so poor without a man to support them that they might threaten public morality or make demands on the public purse” were equally dangerous. The concept that women would own property and, therefore, have economic weight to throw around in a society where they had not been allowed any previous economic or political role scared town fathers because of the perceived damage that these women could do in patriarchal societies. Likewise, those women too poor to support themselves would cause welfare problems and cost too much money to maintain. There was some care available for lower class widows, a type of widow’s asylum. The *Ospizio del Orbatello* provided women a place to live and took care of them as a type of hospice service in exchange for their prayers of those who had recently died. This was one anomaly that was available to some lower-class widows as part of a charitable outreach by the city. In general, however, the flooding of widows in society would then lead to a citywide rise in poverty and the city would become more destitute and less appealing for investors, upper class families, and merchants.

It is important to note that widows in Florence and Italy had different property rights that in other areas of Early Modern Europe. In Florence, “the widow was due nothing more than her own property. She was not regarded as the natural guardian of the children. She had married into a family and that family, her husband’s, had the right to reclaim his property and to manage it on

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30 Hufton, *The Prospect before Her*, 225.
behalf of his heirs.\footnote{Hufton, \textit{The Prospect before Her}, 229.} This is one reason for the high levels of destitute widows in Florence in comparison to other areas of Europe. The widow could “repossess her dowry,” but it often was “an endless source of litigation.”\footnote{Hufton, \textit{The Prospect before Her}, 229.} In some instances, a family would rather hold onto a widow than repay her dowry due to the fact that sometimes a widow’s dowry had been sunk into immovable property or was too large a sum to have in liquefiable cash.\footnote{Hufton, \textit{The Prospect before Her}, 229.} This option could more appealing than being removed from children and sent back to her natal family or into another marriage, but that did depend on the widow’s specific situation, especially the relationship that she had with her in-laws.\footnote{Hufton, \textit{The Prospect before Her}, 229.}

One other option for some widows was noted in their late husband’s connections to the local guild. For widows who had married guild masters, they were left with their husband’s position vacant, often with the option to fill it for a time being. Merry Wiesner-Hanks notes that “the widow of a master [guildsman] might continue to operate the shop for a periods of time after her husband’s death, making her an attractive marriage partner for journeymen in the trade.”\footnote{Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, \textit{Early Modern Europe: 1450-1789}, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 44.} For example, in the Decima, Mona Baccia, moglie già di Giovan’ Maria di Salvestro, is listed as a “tessitore,” a weaver.\footnote{“Mona Baccia, moglie già di Giovan’Maria di Salvestro, tessitore,” S. Maria Novella, fol. 79v, entry number: 1348.00000.} Listed as a part of the “Guild of Silk,” tessitore or tessitori were hired and paid according to the statues of the guild.\footnote{Edgcumbe Staley, \textit{The Guilds of Florence}, (New York: B. Blom, 1967) 212-213.} Considering that the initial listing of tessitore occurs after her husband’s name, it can be presumed that he was also a part of the guild. Mona Baccia’s listing later in the Catasto shows that she was still identifying and paying for her rent via the salary of a tessitore, especially because only two women are listed on the property so there was no male-salary aiding the household. In fact, Olwen Hufton notes the following in her book \textit{The Prospect Before Her}:

Some guilds recognized that the widow should be allowed to continue to practice in her husbands name but sought to impose restrictions on how this might be done. To make this a little less harsh they might allow the widow to carry the right of mastership to any journeyman of the trade she elected to marry within the stipulated interval of up to two years. Or, they could allow her to continue but they would insist that certain functions be carried out by journeyman…In other cases there was a real fear among guild masters and journeyman that any widow could subvert the skill of trade by marrying a journeyman of insufficient experience who would then secure free admission to the mastership. To reduce this threat, many guilds tried to insist that the journeyman who married a widow should be banned from
buying and selling until he had acquired a stipulated number of years' experience. \(^{39}\)

By noting this alternative for some widows, there were opportunities for economic advancement and maintenance with the loss of a husband. Certainly this varied from guild to guild, and even among the same guilds depending upon the master craftsman, the widow, and their situation, but there is proof that these widows were able to secure a place in society to an extent based upon their ability to maintain their husband’s practice.

With all this being said, the case of each widow depended upon her individual situation. The possibility of owning property gave widows more of a fighting chance of surviving on her own without becoming destitute, but it was not always guaranteed. With the public sphere being reserved for men only, these women were forced out of their homes and to get occupations to pay for their survival in certain situations. In this specific instance, the owning and renting of property allowed women a source of income that allowed them to maintain standards socially and economically while still maintaining their place in the private sphere.

Widows and Locations

The location of widows after the loss of a husband varies upon a few determining factors. Much like their economic mobility and property, the widows’ income (if any), her family’s social and economic status, as well as their close proximity, her late husband’s family and their social and economic status, the ages and genders of her children, and the widow’s age were all things that could alter her location after the death of her husband. For this reason, Hufton outlines all the different types of widows that could appear during this period in Florence:

The urban widow, then, could be in anyone of a number of circumstances. She could be an artisan’s widow, one indigenous to the town, with supportive kin groups or a family of grown children to help her, or one who had nothing but young children who were a continual drain on her purse. She could be the widow of a casual labourer who always had difficulty in making ends meet. She could be an immigrant from the surrounding area in good or feeble health. She could be young and hopeful that she would have the chance to remarry in the town, or old and helpless looking for charity. \(^{40}\)

The numerous different classifications of widows and their different situations pose their own set of problems in identifying these women, but those will be examined later on. First, it is important to explore the three main areas that women inhabited after entering widowhood.

One of the options for widows was to remain on her own as the household head. This option was generally not one that was in line with social expectations. With one out of every four women being a widow in 1427, some lived without their children on their own or moved into

\(^{39}\) Hufton, *The Prospect before Her*, 244-246.

\(^{40}\) Hufton, *The Prospect before Her*, 249.
convents. With older children that were not nearby to take care of an older widow, or having borne children who had not lived past adolescence, some widows remained alone. Statistically, these women were the largest at-risk population for destitution and poverty, as she was bereft of the familial structure that was expected traditionally to offer her financial support. Generally, the older the widow and the lower to socio-economic status, the more likely she was to remain alone. However, there is also the option that a wealthier widow would remain unmarried and independent. But there is certainly an argument to be made that she would be taken care of and maintained, whether by her husband’s possessions or her own sources of income.

There is the possibility, however, that some widows were unable to regain or afford a conventional dowry and these widows did turn to the convents in order to survive without their husbands. Convents provided a unique female experience and “cemented female loyalties by providing an array of financial services, which were especially crucial to Florentine widows exposed to social and financial risks.” With most widows moving into convents in their thirties or forties, there are numerous examples of women who had not considered becoming a nun until it was the only viable option. In the case of Abbess Scholastica Rondinelli, she “transitioned from wife to widow to nun in the course of a single year.” There were other widows that hailed from property-owning families and some, like the Benci and Gianfigliazzi, renounced worldly things and became widowed nuns because they “were already old” and in their sixties, seventies, and eighties.

Another option that was appealing to younger and wealthier widows was remarriage. With such an imbalance between men and women during their first marriage, it makes sense that, if able to bear children, a woman would remarry and start a new family with her second (or third) husband. This option was certainly taken by those who were looking to create new family ties outside of their first marriage, and by those who had not had any heirs in their previous marriages.

The concept of a remarriage brought with it some family issues. Though “marriage brought families together,” as Paolo de Certaldo stated, “the widow might betray her own children for ‘her own relatives belonging to her lineage.’” The end of a marriage meant the end of a lineage and, as aforementioned, the proclamation that the wife was due no property, except her dowry, meant that any children from this marriage could be left by the mother in her next marriage. Remarriage required a dowry to give to the next husband and that demanded that the widow reclaim her property and any goods she had been given in her first marriage, which was often a tumultuous process, especially with the desertion of young children. The widow was put in an impossible spot: she could give up her dowry and any chance at remarriage and become an

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outsider, or she could “claim her dowry, remarry…and be forced to abandon her children, provoking bitter memories and resentment on the part of” her children.\textsuperscript{47}

The last option that widows could consider would be moving in with any adult children and creating a multi-generational house. This option applied to both urban and rural widows, with the latter coming in from the countryside to seek “out the amenities and services which towns provided more readily than villages. Some looked for employment as domestics, others came for alms, and still others” wished for the care and companionship of their families.\textsuperscript{48} The attraction of moving into a son’s household was fairly obvious. There was a source of income, a family duty to care for the widow, and the opportunity to remain there until her death. Some widows signed formal contracts with their children to assure their support. For example, a widow could demand “twelve bushels of rye and a place by the fire” in her son’s home until she died.\textsuperscript{49} To highlight the example of widows living with their sons, \textit{Catasto} records show that around age 30, most married households also contain a widowed mother and potentially any children she had from the previous marriage.\textsuperscript{50} In fact, 10\% of urban sons under the age of 28 in Florence cared for their widowed mothers.\textsuperscript{51}

With her occasional return to live with either her father (if she is a young widow) or her brothers/sons, it is vital to note that if the widow was to remarry, “almost never will her new husband join her among her relatives.”\textsuperscript{52} This means that generally it was only young impoverished widows and older widows that living in these multi-family houses. In some cases, wealthier widows would inhabit houses together with the connections of their marriage-kin (more on this will be discussed later).

There is some issue, however, with identifying these different types of widows in the census data of both the \textit{Catasto} and the \textit{Decima Granducale}; mainly, calculating where and how many of these women were widows living with their sons, as this was not always clear-cut or documented. There were a few reasons for this. Firstly, both censuses dealt with issues of taxation and property, so this complicated the counting of household members and their property if a widow owned property outside of the males in the house. In the case of the \textit{Catasto}, “frequently the widow had a claim against the property of an adult son for the return on her dowry and this confusion of possessions was strong reason for counting her in the son’s household. Still, she might hold property in her own name, which rendered her independent of her offspring,” meaning that she would be counted with her property as a separate household even though she was living in her son’s home.\textsuperscript{53} Unfortunately, this occurrence was not always dealt with in the same way, so sometimes widows were counted twice in the overall record.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{48} Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, \textit{Tuscans and Their Families}, 152.
\textsuperscript{49} Wiesner-Hanks, \textit{Early Modern Europe}, 74.
\textsuperscript{50} Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, \textit{Tuscans and Their Families}, 311.
\textsuperscript{51} Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, \textit{Tuscans and Their Families}, 309.
\textsuperscript{52} Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, \textit{Tuscans and Their Families}, 290.
\textsuperscript{53} Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, \textit{Tuscans and Their Families}, 13.
\textsuperscript{54} Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, \textit{Tuscans and Their Families}, 30.
Secondly, on the opposite end of the spectrum, some “aged women, particularly within the poorest stratum of the population, were never noticed.” These included women who lived by themselves, who were struggling to find homes and convents to care for them, as well as some widows who were living with their adult children. The movement of widows from rural to urban centers also caused miscounting and miscalculation about how many widows there were. The exact locations of poorer and older widows were much less stable than other groups in society at the time.

Also, officials were required to “declare as *miseriabili* those men of women whom age or infirmary rendered incapable of earning a living.” Often this meant that widows were not required to pay a tax, but were still required to file a return and be counted. Unfortunately, in most cases, a return was not filed and a tax was not issued, so the exact number of widows in Florence during this period is uncertain.

One of the larger issues that historians confront when looking at the counting of widows during this period, as well as the acknowledgement by both society and the governmental agencies conducting these census tabulations of the population. Generally, patriarchal governments assumed that their children would provide for widows or have a welfare system to care for them, as provided by a church or women’s group, such as the *Orbatello*.

Unfortunately, in Florence, the widow was not necessarily seen as someone in need. As aforementioned, widows had the ability to own and control property, their husband’s workshop (if he had left one), and their dowries. In theory, if a woman had these rights and resources, she should be able to function as a head of the household. Unfortunately, the practical issue in this is the inability for all widows to have access to their dowries, occupations, and property. The reality was that “both the rich and poor hearths include few solitary individuals.” The level of widows who were recognized as the heads of households became significant around the collective age of 40, with 10% of all households being run by women. By age 50, women headed 25% of the households and 50% of households were run by women after the age of 60. This significant portion of the population was expected to be part of a society that they had been barred from economically for their entire lives. This made the acquisition of economic goods and stability difficult if the widow was not of a higher social class.

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56 Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families*, 144.
Besides the desire to own property, the location of a widow also speaks to her economic status, as well as her place in the community. Women that were able to keep their husband’s properties and receive income from their own properties were generally able to live on their own and not rely upon either their children or their husband’s families to take them in. Younger widows that left their late husband’s home to get remarried often had some economic and social mobility because they would have reclaimed a dowry in order to remarry and start another family.

The widows that were forced to move in with their adult children, or to remain destitute and on their own, were certainly a prominent group. These women were, as shown, generally part of the lowest socio-economic group. This could be because they were unable to repossess their dowry, or their children did not take them in as part of the household, or because they had moved from the rural countryside into the urban city in search of a job or aid in survival. The social location of the widow is certainly important, and that it why scholarly studies like the DECIMA Project are incredibly useful in detailing the spatial locations of widows, as well as their neighbors and other family connections to the property.

Census Data and Spatial Closeness

The spatial component of widowhood is important for understanding exactly how many women fell into this category as well as how and if their location impacted their status. By utilizing tools, such as the DECIMA, to search these census records, it is possible to better understand the experiences and surroundings of these women. As aforementioned, there are some current limitations to the DECIMA’s GIS map of Florence. By only showing the Santa Maria Novella quarter of the city, historians are confined spatially to a smaller data set. In the future with the release of the rest of the map, the opportunity to compare this section to the other with the S. Maria Novella to show the full examination of Florentine widows and their proximity to other widows will be available to historians.

In order to compare the Decima/DECIMA map with the Catasto, the S. Maria Novella quarter has four sections within its district lines. Vipera, Unicorno, Leon Rosso, and Leon Bianco are the four neighborhoods (gonfaloni) located in the S. Maria Novella quarter. There were sixteen total gonfaloni in Florence, and four gonfaloni within each quarter of the city. Figure A shows a map detailing the gonfaloni that were created by the Catasto records. By limiting the widows located in each gonfaloni, it becomes easier to compare the same households by last name and location and their overall tolerance for widows in the family between the Catasto in 1427 and the Decima in 1561.
In order to keep the comparison between the two censuses accurate, the focus of this spatial mapping section will be on the Leon Bianco gonfalone. This area occupies a relatively small area in Florence, but the tightly packed housing in the area offers many opportunities to locate widows and their property. The following investigation will be informed by the findings from the DECIMA project.

By mapping out the approximate boundaries of the Leon Bianco neighborhood as per Figure 1, locating the search queries becomes much more effective. As Figure 2 shows, the outline is approximate, but the Buonsignori layer that comprises the DECIMA map also informs it.

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Figure 2.
The boundary lines of *gonfalone* Leon Bianco.
The S. Maria Novella quarter is shown in yellow, S. Giovanni in blue, and S. Croce in pink.

After the boundary is noted, the addition of the S. Maria Novella quarter is applied. This layer shows a dot on the map that accounts for every mention of a household in the *Decima Granducale*. In correspondence to this point on the map, there is an account of each particular marker at the bottom which details the owners, renters, occupations of those related to the house in any way, and, potentially, the marital status. Figure 3 shows the application of this layer before any searches are made to the markers present.

Figure 3
The population markers appearing within the outline will be the focused data set.

Identifying the widows associated with this particular neighborhood requires the search function of the DECIMA. The easiest way to locate which markers house (or which households...
rent from) widows is to search for the term “moglie” as in “de moglie già” or “already the wife of,” implying that the husband is deceased and the property belongs to her. This distinction allows for numerous search results within the area of Leon Bianco, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4
Each blue circular marker represents a mention of a widow in the Decima census records. This could be the owner of the property, a renter, or someone living on the premises under other circumstances.

The reason that this search is more effective than searching for “vedova” (widow) is that, as aforementioned, widows were generally without an occupation, so they generally did not list themselves as such. The concept that the listing of “vedova” is much like the listing of an occupation for a man; this was her occupation and how she was identified in the community. More often, women were listed as the “wife of” an already passed husband. The search for “vedova” brings up far fewer searches, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5
The blue squares show the search for “vedova” versus the markers for “moglie già,” shown in this figure again as blue circular markers.

In looking at the results for “vedova,” three women. The first is Mona Maddalena, a widow who is the main renter of the Convent of S. Maria Novella. The convent is held a sua vita (for life) by Fumante di Benedetto Fumati and Mona Maddalena is his main renter on this property. The listing of her occupation as a widow may be to show her commitment to remain single as part of the convent, unlike some members who would have been single their entire lives, or to give her more status than others who had never married. Another woman marked as “vedova” was Mona Marietta, a renter who lived under the households of Tonino, a rivenditore (used goods dealer), and Mona Lucrezia, the widow of Tommasso del Buono. The property belonged to Mona Camilla, the wife of Ser Giovanni da Corella. In this instance, there were three widows in relation to each other through their property lending. None are directly related and each represents a distinct socio-economic class with one woman owning the property, one women renting as the head of the household and another renting under the head, but it is important to note the interactions, direct or indirect, that these women had.

The final listed “vedova” in the Leon Bianco neighborhood is Mona Benedetta, who is sharing the household with Mona Alessandra, the wife of Jacopo dell’Oriulo. The interesting note about Mona Benedetta is that she occupies the household with two listed men: Cesare di Savino, a leatherworker from Siena, and Sandrino di Michelangelo, a spinner of thread. Mona Benedetta’s entry lists her as a “vedova incantatrice” meaning “widow enchantress.” This specification of widow details a particular skill and service that Mona Benedetta provided, namely that “enchantress” or “sorcerer” would make her known for her magic or healing. The reason for this specific listing as to the type of widow would be to distinguish her from other widows who did not have the same practices.

By looking just at widows, described as “a moglie già,” who are listed as the owners of the property, whether they inhabit the household or rent it out to others, there are 15 total holdings by widows in the Leon Bianco area. These women own property that is clustered together, especially if they have multiple properties. Figure 6 shows these properties.

63 “Mona Maddalena, vedova,” S. Maria Novella, fol. 45v, entry number: 774.000000.
65 Mona Camilla, moglie già Ser Giovanni da Corella,” S. Maria Novella, fol. 63v, entry number: 1094.00000.
66 “Mona Benedetta, vedova incantrice,” S. Maria Novella, fol. 91v, entry number: 1572.00000. “Mona Alessandra moglie già Jacopo dell’Oriulo,” S. Maria Novella, fol. 91v, entry number 1094.00000.
67 Cesare di Savino, sanese, sellaio…Sandrino di Michelangelo, filatoiaio,” S. Maria Novella, fol. 91v, Entry number: 1094.00000.
Markers with a red line indicate their ownership by widows. Some properties are owned by the same widow which explains the close proximity of some of these properties, but most are single holdings, with multiple widows owning properties near one another, specifically looking at those along Via Porte Rossa, the southern-most boundary, and Via de’ Tomabuoni, the connection road to the left of Via Porte Rossa. In the northern section, the clustering of property is around Via Del Panzano and Piazza de Santa Maria Novella, making the top left corner of the gonfalone.

Widows holding multiple properties beg the question “were widows of the same families holding property located near one another?” This of course requires two searches. First, the properties need to be identified as either housing the widow (as part of the household, but not head) or as the owner if she is renting out her property to others. Second, of the widows who are listed as owners, how many of them were related, either by blood or by marriage. Figure 7 shows the listing of widows who owned property within which neighborhood?. At first glance, it appears that none of the widows are related since none of them share the same family name through their husbands. However, after searching further for the patrilineal name of the husband’s family, other results appear to show connections.
Widows listed by their husbands, number/type of properties owned from the DECIMA listings for S. Maria Novella’s gonfalone Leon Bianco.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Widow</th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Relatives Listed (<em>Not Located Nearby</em>)</th>
<th>Other Family Widows Listed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mona Maria</td>
<td>Antonio di Giovanni Pollini</td>
<td>Francesco di Zanobi Pollini (father)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Camilla</td>
<td>Ser Giovanni da Corella</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Sice</td>
<td>Giovanni Maria da Salevestri</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Maria</td>
<td>Lorenzo di Guillaume Buci</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Zita</td>
<td>Francesco, detta Lamentone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Devota</td>
<td>Giachinetti</td>
<td>Giachinetti (brother)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Caterina</td>
<td>Lorenzo Guiducci</td>
<td>Ledoneco di Giovanni Guiducci</td>
<td>Mona Pippa, moglie d’Ugolino Ugolini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Francesca</td>
<td>Giovanni della Volta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Pippa</td>
<td>Ugolino di Maestro Ugolino, Ugolino</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Bianca</td>
<td>Giovanni di Lorenzo Spigletti</td>
<td>Arcangelo di Buon Lorenzo Spigletti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Lisa</td>
<td>Vincenzo di Tommaso Sasseti</td>
<td>Redi di Federico di Galeazzo Sasseti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Caterina</td>
<td>Roberto Ferrucci</td>
<td>Redi di Federico di Galeazzo Sasseti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Lucretia</td>
<td>Anton Francesco Davanzati</td>
<td>Redi di Filippo di Galeazzo Sasseti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Lisa</td>
<td>Bernabino d’Anton Francesco Davanzati</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Lisa</td>
<td>Ludovico dei Nobili</td>
<td>Messer Leonardo dei Nobili, Cavaliere di S. Jacopo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Donato di dei Nobili</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Antoniet di Giovanni di Nobili Francesco di Giovanni di Nobili</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8
A list of widow property owners and their respective relatives living or owning property within the neighborhood of Leon Bianco from the DECIMA listings of widows in this area.

As Figure 8 shows, there are generally close connections between widow property-owners and their relatives. Generally, if there was more wealth in the family, it was more likely that properties would be purchased and split among family members, creating a social saturation of these wealthier families. The more wealthy and socially stable the family, the more likely it was for widows to share neighboring properties, as seen in Figure 8. The relatives listed in Figure 8 are only those that have been identified within the boundaries of the Leon Bianco neighborhood. Unless otherwise noted, the properties in question are next door to each other. This spatial realization shows the interconnected nature that families had towards their widows in the wealthier classes. For example, in looking specifically at these wealthier Florentine families, including the Strozzi, de Medici, and the Davanzati, “suggests that families made conscious efforts to establish an electoral base in a particular gonfalone. Certainly the habit for the vast majority of Florentine families was “for individual households to cluster together in the neighborhood of the same gonfalone…which made them heavily dependent” on one another for their position in society and their care for family.”

The overall strategy is that by giving widows property, they would pass the property to the heirs of the husband’s family, allowing for opportunities for the land to grow in its economic value as well as to keep the family unit together and strong. The wealth of the family is based upon the continuous property earnings on the owned land. The socio-economic ties are linked.

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Because marriage was not just the union of two individuals, but also the building of family alliances, the connection of close spatial proximity, especially with property ownership, makes sense. One example of this is the Davanzati widows, who will be mentioned later. Both widows owned property adjacent to each other and listed themselves as widows of the Davanzati family, a profitable situation to be in considering the wealth of the family. Another reason for the close proximity could be that husbands would leave their wives the property in their will, especially if the husband had multiple properties in his name. After his male heirs (if there were any) were awarded their share, it would be possible for the husband to leave his wife a source of income after his death. Both of these possibilities shed light on why widows were often surrounded by other family members.

Although this is a small sample, there is proof of the close proximity of family members to one another, especially in relation to widows and their property. As mentioned earlier, the possibilities that a wealthier family would help care for a widow, especially if her father’s name was of value socially and/or economically, is a common reality. As Figure 8 shows, both brothers of the late husband and other male relatives can be listed on the Decima entry along with the widow herself. This was due to the need for women to have a male guardian to act on her behalf and also to make claim to her husband’s family though another relative. It also allows for the widows property to be looked after and easily absorbed if she does not pass it on to any heirs. Yet, there is shown in the sample one instant in which two widows, related by marriage, have property next to each other. The overall reason for proximity is to keep the ties between the family, both immediate and extended, close to each other to maintain the stability, both economically and socially, of the family.

Mona Lucrezia, moglie già d’Angelo d’Antonio Davanzati, and Mona Fiametta Davanzati, moglie già di Anton’ Francesco Davanzati, were both widows of the Davanzati family. They had married into a large elite Florentine family that was known for its merchant traders and well-educated men. Knowing the status of this family and, therefore, the women’s dowries, it makes sense then that the family would have had property that might be inherited by widowed women who had married into the family. It would benefit both families to enter into a marriage in which there was a relatively equal display of property and social power. In fact, Nobleman Niccolo Guicciardini sought to handle the issue of “unequal” marriages by stating, “In case any of his daughters should marry and afterward, on account of the impoverishment of the husband…she should be free to return” and leave the marriage. The level of importance placed upon equal statuses marrying each other was in part to benefit both parties and their families during the marriage, but also to aid either one in case of the death of a spouse.

The security was not only for the wives, but also to maintain the alliance with their families, which was especially necessary with a merchant family who faced bankruptcy in the

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69 “Mona Lucrezia, moglie già d’Angelo d’Antonio Davanzati,” S. Maria Novella, fol.89r, entry number: 1491.00000. “Mona Fiametta Davanzati, moglie d’Angelo d’Antonio Davanzati,” S. Maria Novella, fol. 89r, entry number:1498.00000.


71 Cohn, Women in the Streets, 44.
With numerous merchant companies rebuilding at the time of the *Catasto* in 1427, it concludes that they would have maintained their property wealth as well as their status by the time the *Decima Guanducale* took place. By looking at the DECIMA results for the name “Davanzati,” there are quite a few properties held by the family, both men and women, renting and residency, as seen in Figure 9. The applications of the spatial location of the widows with historical context helps to explain further the situations and trends of widowhood during this period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Davanzati Family Holdings in S. Maria Novella</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piero di Bartolomeo Davanzati and his wife, household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Catarina, moglie gia di Bartolomeo Davanzati household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dino di Davanzati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Costanza, Davanzati, moglie gia di Niccolo d’ Antonio Gianfigliazi suo figliuolo owner resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giov’ Francesco Davanzati household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorenzo di Piero Davanzati owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Fimmetta Davanzati, moglie d’Angelo D’Antonio Davanzat owner, resident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Lucrezia, moglie gia di Anton’ Francesco Davanzati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernardina d’Anton’ Francesco Davanzati</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9
The holdings of the Davanzati family from the *Decima* include both the males of the family and widows with properties being owned and inhabited by the owners, being rented to other members of the community, and being lived in without rent.

The sharing of properties without rent show the connections had socially and economically to allow members to live on property without paying.

Besides the DECIMA project, there is the possibility to use Herlihy’s online database for the *Catasto*. Though it does not offer the same amount of location detail that the *Decima Granducale* did, it still separates entries by their location, their marital status, and their occupation. By searching and only looking at Leon Bianco in the S. Maria Novella quarter, it is possible to make a direct comparison between the census in 1427 and the aforementioned one in 1561.

The *Catasto* lists 126 women who identified themselves as “widows.” Certainly, this is larger than those labeled as such in the *Decima*, but there are certain differences between the two data sets. By narrowing down the data set to only show widows who were listed as the head of the household, 23 out of the 107 widows owned the property that they inhabited. Most of these women also owned other real estate property (82%), showing that they not only owned their residence, but also other tracts that provided a source of income. Figure 9 shows the breakdown of each type of widow in the *Catasto* sample. The *Decima* has similar statistics showing that 14 out of the 81 widows listed in the *gonfalone* of Leon Bianco were property owners. With 17% of widows being property owners, it shows that even decades later, ownership was still a way in which widows created income for themselves.\(^{73}\)

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Out of the 107 widows listed as heads of household in Leon Bianco in the *Catasto*, above is the breakdown of how their property was classified with “open” referring to it being uninhabited, but able to be rented. This does not account for widows who both owned the property they lived in as well as other properties they might have owned.

Another group of widows owning property are absentee landlords, who owned real estate in the area, but did not inhabit this property. This could be because they lived with relatives in a combined household, such as those widowed living with adult sons and yet being counted separately in the *Catasto* because of their ownership of property. More likely, these women inhabited areas outside of the Leon Bianco and S. Maria Novella. 14 out of the 107 widows owned property in Leon Bicano, but did not reside there. A few names stand out among the roster as sharing a patrilineal name: Federighi, Rucellai, and Strozzi families have multiple entries under multiple widows. These families were known throughout Florence and these two, along with the Strozzi invested in the *gonfalone* of Lion Rosso, making them the strongest families socially, economically, and governmentally. These widows were set up financially and by their patrilineal relationships with their late husband’s relatives. Though not every listing has a patrilineal name, Herlihy observes that only those of the upper classes would have had this distinction in nomenclature.

Another interesting fact about these widows is their overall age. As mentioned earlier, generally younger widows would remarry until they could no longer produce children, meaning that widows who remained as such were generally older. The average age of the property-
owning sample group is 60 years old in the *Catasto*.\textsuperscript{76} Some widows were certainly older, and they could have been holding property since they were young, but on average, the women who listed herself as a widow was well past her childbearing years. This also indicates that there are some widows who were younger. They might have been unable to regain their dowry or raise a new one to remarry, or were able to get by with working on their own.

There were reasons for widows to elect not to remarry and they were not entirely based upon age. Some widows feared a bad marriage, could not obtain a dowry to support the marriage they wanted, or there were outstanding circumstances, generally private, that blockaded them from remarriage. Girolamo Savonarola discussed widows, their place in society, and their biblically based expectations in *A Guide to Righteous Living and Other Works*. Savonarola noted that not all women remarry after their first marriage and that “some are in a better state” for remaining single, whether for their spiritual or economic benefit.\textsuperscript{77} By noting that there are multiple factors in each individual situation, it helps to explain the numerous different options that widows pursued.

In this sample from the *Catasto*, there are families that had multiple widows owning property within the same gonfalone. This suggests that these widows did live in close proximity to one another, and other members of their late husband’s family. By looking at both the spatial closeness of widows with the *Decima Granducale* and the DECIMA project and comparing it to the listings given in the *Catasto*, there is proof that wealthy widows who owned property did live in close proximity. This suggests that there was an expectation that the husband’s family would care for her by providing her with property or by returning to her any property that she had as part of her dowry in certain situations.

Dowries are an extremely important factor that widows needed to consider after the deaths of their husbands. Thomas Kuehn’s work on widows along with Stanley Chojnacki in *Time, Space and Women’s Lives in Early Modern Europe* discussed the “widows, directly possessed of property (including the now returned dowry)...had the most potential and need to be active in the disposal and use of property and legal rights.”\textsuperscript{78} In some instances, husband’s pledged property and securities to “back the return of their wives’ dowries: following their death. This gave these widows “incentive not to remarry but to remain in their husbands’ homes” and raise any children from the marriage.\textsuperscript{79}

There is also a case to be made for widows living in close proximity to one another. Throughout the DECIMA project there are entries showing widows cohabitating in the same household, some “a sua vita” meaning they do not pay rent, while other are a “pigione,” a renter. Each situation varies, but the idea that widows would live together to pool resources together to pay for a place to live is not an unfounded theory. In one *Decima* entry, Mona Dianora, moglie

\textsuperscript{76} Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families*, 216-217.
\textsuperscript{79} Shutte, Kuehn, *Time, Space, and Women’s Lives in Early Modern Europe*, x.
già di Lorenzo Spigiliati is the property owner with Mona Cosa sua figluola, moglie già di Ser Lorenzo Carli as the head of the household. Mona Cosa is living on the property “a sua vita” without rent payment, as the other inhabitants pay, and she is also living with her daughter (sua figliuola) and there is a potential for her daughter to continue living there until she gets married. It is also likely widows that do not appear in these census records. Some of them were probably just passed over by the census takers, while others did not list themselves as widows, potentially to avoid extra taxes on their or their son’s households. Considering the potential for error in both inventories, there is certainly room for speculation on this issue.

Conclusions

By examining widows throughout Florence from 1427 through 1561, there are a few findings on the meaning of widowhood and their socio-economic place in the city. Women were forced to straddle cultural boundaries in their new position in the public sphere. They needed to provide for themselves if their husband’s will did not, and potentially also for young children. They could also have the duty of continuing on a husband’s trade if he had been a master craftsman. The duties that fell into a widow’s lap after the death of her husband were numerous, and yet, she still remained a woman, unable to fully participate in social, economic, and legal activities in the stead of her mate.

Widows who owned property tended to belong to the upper classes, which allowed them some form of agency. The ability to maintain land and potentially receive a source of income from renters allowed women the option to continue making money without having to leave the private sphere within the home. If her husband or her husband’s family gave property to the widow, there was a certain mutual relationship between the two. The expectation that the wife would not remarry and give the land to another husband was assumed, and that the husband’s family would continue to care and provide for the widow. The marriage created a combined structure of family, parenti, around the new widow. This group was to “help one another…in private life and all other circumstances,” including the loss of the patriarch. These relationships are shown not only by the closeness of brothers and fathers to widows of the family, but also in the closeness of widows to each other who had no other connection besides marriage into the same family.

The exploration of widows and their property holdings shows not only women’s abilities to maintain themselves after their husband’s death, but also that this was a fairly common occurrence. There are more than a few fleeting examples of women as property owners, both in the Catasto and the Decima Granducale. The option to look at the proximity of widows renting property to other property-owning widows shows a type of kinship that appears for these women, which is logical. The connection of widowhood formed a bond between these women, sometimes stretching across class boundaries, as shown by widows renting their properties to other widows or cohabitating with them. The connections that a past marriage had on a woman’s

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80 “Mona Dinora, moglie già di Giovanni di Lorenzo Spigiliati,” S. Maria Novella, Fol. 85v, Entry Number 1434.00000.
81 Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and Their Families, 299.
82 Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and Their Families, 355.
agency shows that these relationships went beyond lifespan of their husbands, which allowed women a chance to support themselves and their children.

The option for women to remarry and leave the family and these connections also speaks to her socio-economic place in society, as well as her age and eligibility. If young enough to have children, a widow could leave her first husband’s family, and sometimes his children, to marry again in hopes of gaining status, property, and a family. As aforementioned, every situation is different and depends upon the wealth and status of the widow, but if the amount of property was enough to provide a living and suitable care for any children, it concludes that women would be less likely to remarry. However, there is also the potential for a widow to marry up economically and socially with the addition of her newly inherited property, so it is difficult to address all circumstances with their numerous variables.

The connections that women made through marriage extended, potentially, for the rest of their lives and could also include their children. By looking at marriage as an opportunity for women to maintain their position socially and economically, it concludes that property holdings would play an important place at looking at the stability and functionality of widowhood in Florence, Italy. The more property that a widow held, the more agency she controlled in her own right, and the more likely it was that she might avoid remarriage and remain a widow.
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