CASA TORRE TRINCADINI

PONTREMOLI, NICODEMO TRANCHEDINI AND THE HISTORY OF A RESIDENCE

HISTORICAL BOOKLET IN ENGLISH



A story of roads, borders, diplomacy, books and architecture

HOW TO READ THIS BOOKLET

A house within history

This booklet reconstructs the history of Casa Torre Trincadini, broadening its perspective to encompass Pontremoli, Lunigiana and Nicodemo Tranchedini. It distinguishes documented facts, scholarly interpretations and local traditions. Rather than seeking a single legendary origin, it shows how roads, political divisions, family archives and architectural transformations have shaped, over time, the place we can inhabit today.

The tower-house stands at the meeting point of a town shaped by roads, a Renaissance diplomat and a contemporary restoration.

PART I Lunigiana, Pontremoli and the Via Francigena

PART II Cacciaguerra, factions and Milanese rule

PART III The tower-house and the fire of 1495

PART IV The public life of Nicodemo Tranchedini

PART V Documents, books, family and memory

PART VI From palace to contemporary restoration

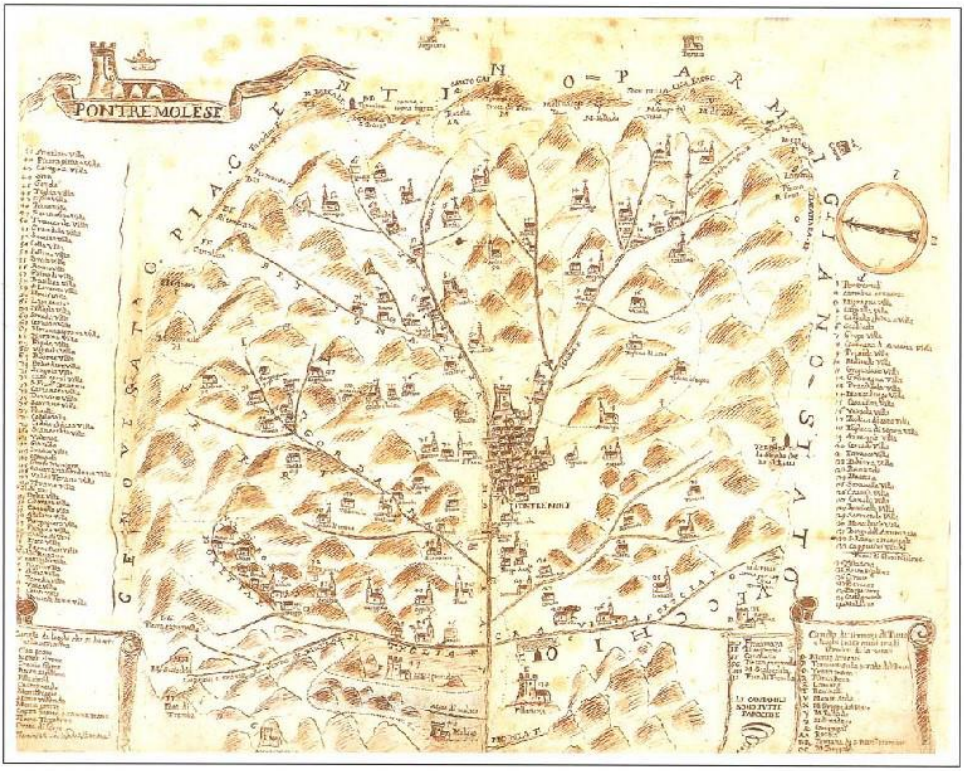
APPENDIX Chronology, sources and research criteria

Editorial approach

These texts are a general-reader adaptation of the documents and studies listed at the end of the booklet. Quotations have been kept to a minimum; chronological uncertainties and questions of attribution are identified in the text.



Nicodemo Trincadini's first coat of arms, drawn in one of his books, De Bello Gallico, now in the Biblioteca Riccardiana in Florence.



A seventeenth-century print depicting the "Pontremolese", the northernmost part of Lunigiana.

A LAND OF MOUNTAIN PASSES Lunigiana, a geography of connections

The history of Pontremoli begins with geography. The upper Magra valley is a hinge between the Po plain, the Apennines and the Tyrrhenian Sea. Mountain ridges were not merely barriers: for centuries, passes, ridgelines and waterways connected the valleys of the Magra, Taro and Vara. Merchants, pilgrims, armies, officials and shepherds moved through this network of routes, making Lunigiana both a frontier region and a meeting place.

Research into medieval settlement discourages any image of an isolated, unchanging region. Lunigiana had many centres: villages, castles, parish churches, river and sea landings, cultivated areas and pastures formed a complex economic landscape. The absence of one dominant large city did not mean emptiness, but rather a plurality of centres and authorities. The diocese of Luni, the Malaspina, the communes of Sarzana and Pontremoli, and numerous rural lordships competed for roads, tolls, justice and security.

Pontremoli occupied the most sensitive point in this system. At the confluence of the Verde and the Magra, close to the routes crossing the Apennines, it controlled access to northern Tuscany. Later sources called it the “gate and key of Tuscany”, an expression that encapsulates the political importance of its location. The town, the tower-house and the biography of Nicodemo Tranchedini all become easier to understand when viewed through this geography of movement.

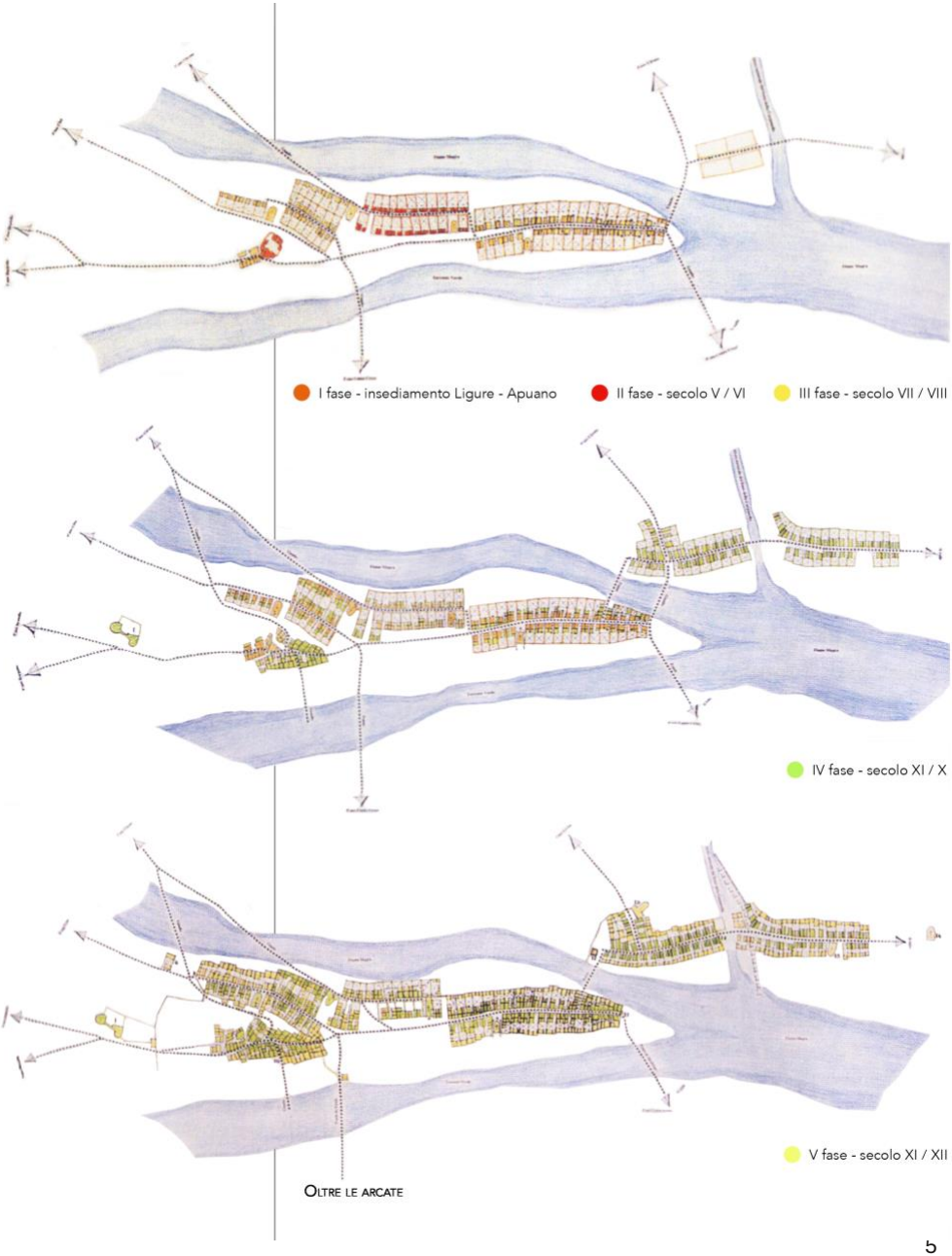
BEFORE PONTREMOLI From Roman times to the early Middle Ages

In Roman times Lunigiana lay between the territories of Luni and Lucca. These two colonies, established in the second century BC following the wars against the Apuan Ligurians, helped organise an area already crossed by land and sea routes. The region itself takes its name from Luni, but its history cannot be reduced to that of the coastal city: the mountainous interior developed in its own way, with dispersed settlements and continuing connections between the two sides of the Apennines.

Between the end of the Roman Empire and the early Middle Ages, the territory was caught up in the struggle between Byzantines and Lombards and subsequently incorporated into the Carolingian order. Archaeological and documentary research reveals a complex picture in which political frontiers did not put an end to local exchanges. Parish churches, castles and hilltop settlements arose or became established in relation to routes, resources and the need for control.

An overly linear narrative should be avoided. There was no single moment when ancient Lunigiana became medieval, nor any one road that explains every development. The transformation was gradual. When Pontremoli clearly appears in written sources in the late tenth century, it was already part of an inhabited, travelled and contested territory. Its growth would depend precisely on its ability to concentrate previously dispersed functions: markets, defence, hospitality, toll collection and the administration of justice.

Topographical hypotheses concerning the development of the settlement and its fortifications



THE EARLIEST RECORDS Puntremel and the documented birth of the town

The earliest generally accepted mention of Pontremoli appears in the itinerary of Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury. In 990, on his return from Rome, he recorded Puntremel as the thirty-first stage of his journey. This form is strikingly close to the local pronunciation, Puntrémel, and shows that by the late tenth century the place was already recognised as a stopping point on a trans-Apennine route.

In 1014 a charter of Henry II refers to the stratam de Ponte Tremulo. The document confirms the relationship between the settlement, the bridge and the road. A century and a half later, Philip Augustus of France, returning from the Crusade in 1191, also passed through Punt-Tremble and nearby Munt-Bardum. The spellings vary, but the geographical junction is unmistakable.

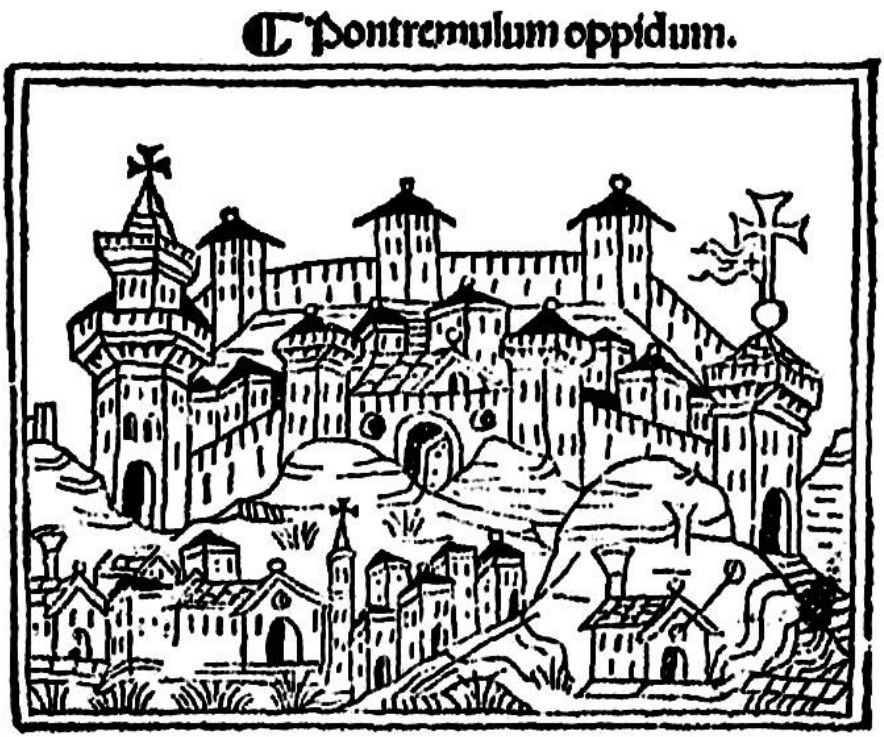
The origin of the name has not been conclusively established. Giorgio Petracco suggested interpreting pons tremulus not as an unstable or trembling bridge, but as a technical term for a suspension bridge. This is an intriguing hypothesis, not a certainty. The same scholar places the original nucleus near the connection between the two historic areas on the banks of the Magra. The town may have developed between the ninth and tenth centuries in a naturally defensible position where the routes over Monte Bardone and the Bratello met. On this reading, Pontremoli did not arise by chance beside a road: it developed because several roads and several needs for control converged at one point.

THE VIA FRANCIGENA Not one line but a network of routes

Today the Via Francigena is often represented as a continuous, stable itinerary. In the Middle Ages the reality was more flexible. Enrica Salvatori describes Lunigiana as a dense network of routes: a principal axis, local alternatives, Apennine passes, east–west connections and outlets towards the sea and rivers. The route chosen depended on the season, security, political relationships and road conditions.

The Monte Bardone mentioned in medieval sources corresponds to the Cisa area. Crossing it meant entering a landscape governed by communities, lords, castles and hospices. Pilgrimage, trade and warfare often used the same corridors. The Francigena was therefore not merely a religious route: it was also an economic and political structure. Whoever maintained a bridge, protected a section of road or collected a toll could turn mobility into power.

Pontremoli provided accommodation, a market, services and control. The constant flow of travellers connected the town to distant worlds but also exposed it to outside pressures. Its institutions developed through negotiation with emperors and lords, while local families learned to operate beyond their own region. Centuries later, Nicodemo Tranchedini's career would embody that same vocation: leaving Pontremoli to connect Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples and the courts of Europe.



THE COMMUNE Pontremoli and Frederick Barbarossa

By the twelfth century Pontremoli had become a political interlocutor. Frederick I Barbarossa stayed in the town in 1160. On 1 February 1167 he recognised royal rights and toll-collecting powers for its inhabitants in exchange for a payment and the obligation to supply one hundred men for four months. The privilege reveals an organised community able to negotiate with the emperor and turn control of the road into autonomy.

The relationship was not, however, one of simple loyalty. In September of that same year, when the imperial army was weakened, the people of Pontremoli blocked its passage. Barbarossa had to take a difficult alternative route under the guidance of Opizzo Malaspina. The episode clearly demonstrates the town's bargaining power: whoever controlled the Pontremoli junction could influence even the emperor's movements.

The commune therefore grew through concessions, resistance and shifting alliances. Its freedoms were not a peaceful possession, but the result of continual negotiation with greater powers. Pontremoli defended its roads and markets, administered tolls and tried to preserve room for manoeuvre between Empire, bishop of Luni, Malaspina and neighbouring cities. The ability to negotiate, change sides and produce documents would become an enduring feature of its political culture.

ROADS AND POWER Markets, tolls and security

Governing a medieval road did not mean owning every stretch of it. Above all, it meant being able to make rules, collect tolls, provide protection, maintain bridges and crossings, and adjudicate disputes. Every traveller needed places to rest, change horses, buy provisions or receive assistance. Economic activities and religious institutions developed around these needs.

Pontremoli's location benefited craftspeople, merchants, notaries and innkeepers. At the same time it made fortifications and garrisons essential. Piagnaro Castle kept watch from above, while bridges, gates and towers controlled movement within the settlement. Its elongated urban plan followed the waterways and the main route, giving the town a shape still visible in the historic centre.

Recent scholarship emphasises the reciprocal relationship between roads and authorities: roads supported rulers, but rulers could also make them safe or dangerous. A local war could redirect an itinerary; a new fortification could concentrate traffic; a tax privilege could enrich a community. The tower-house belongs to this urban landscape of control and prestige. Its position is not merely picturesque: it recalls a town in which living, trading and defending oneself were closely intertwined.

1322 Cacciaguerra: a town divided in stone

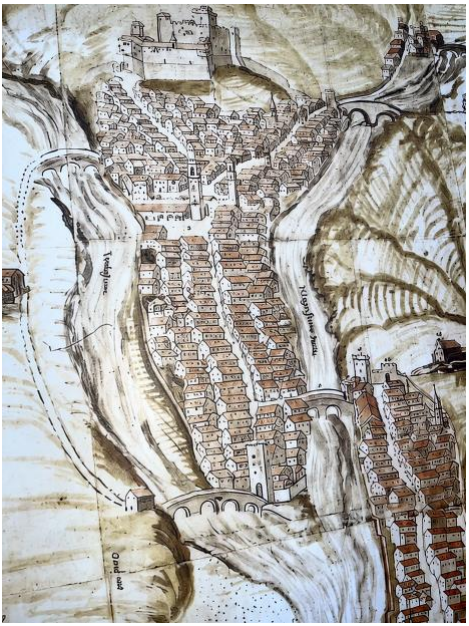
In 1322, during the lordship of Castruccio Castracani degli Antelminelli, a fortified barrier known as the Cacciaguerra was built. It cut across the settlement and was intended to contain internal conflict. Its very name appears to proclaim its purpose: to drive war out of the town. In practice the barrier made the separation between the factions stable and visible. It divided the two political parties: Guelphs in the northern area and Ghibellines in the southern one.

The Cacciaguerra was not simply an outward-facing defence. Within Pontremoli it became the material sign of factional divisions. The town gradually organised itself into Cazzaguerra supra and Cazzaguerra infra, the upper and lower parts. The frontier thus passed inside the walls, between neighbours who shared roads, rivers, markets and interests but belonged to opposing political groups. One very concrete sign was the construction of two bridges over each river: for the Guelph side, the Crësa bridge and the Ponte di Supra; for the Ghibelline side, the Casotto or Ponte di Sotto and the Castelnuovo bridge.

This division endured for a long time. Hospitals, charitable institutions, political representation and notarial practices were distributed between the two parts. The name Cacciaguerra, now also given to one of the residence's rooms, preserves the memory of that internal boundary. Remembering it does not mean reducing the town's history to endless conflict. Rather, it means understanding how architectural forms can affect social life, turning a temporary measure into an identity that lasts for generations.

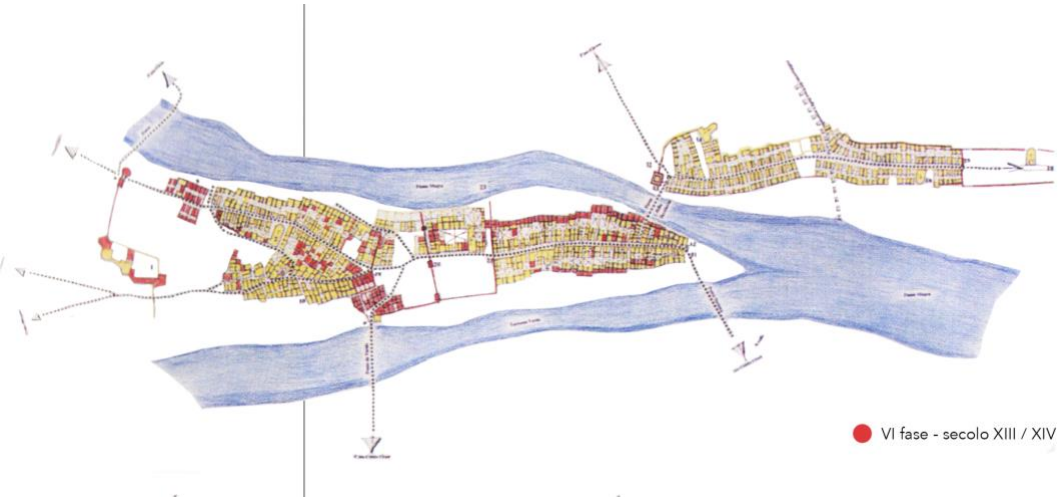


Pontremoli and the memory of the Cacciaguerra: an aerial view, a historic depiction of the three towers, and the bell tower, now a symbol of the town.



Detail of a seventeenth-century print showing the four bridges described above.

Topographical hypothesis of Pontremoli in the



fourteenth century

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY Two parts, two bishops, an almost-city

In the fifteenth century Pontremoli was economically, politically and demographically important, but it had no episcopal see of its own. Olga Ricci describes it as an almost-city: an urban centre with advanced civic functions but without the title and institutions normally identifying a fully recognised city.

The simultaneous presence of the bishops of Luni and Brugnato made matters even more unusual. Both prelates became involved in local factions, and their actions heightened tensions. The division between upper and lower areas was reflected in two councils, two notarial registers and two patron saints. By mid-century the Enreghini were principally associated with the upper town and the Villani with the lower town.

Milanese government did not abolish this arrangement: it formalised it and partly used it to administer the town. A ducal commissioner, Giovanni Della Porta, described a situation in which inhabitants of one part even avoided entering the area occupied by the other. This is an extreme image, but it conveys the depth of the conflict. Pontremoli was united by its walls and divided by allegiance. The Tranchedini family developed in precisely this environment: a society accustomed to political mediation, notarial writing and the need to move between competing powers.

TOWARDS MILAN A frontier community within the Visconti sphere

Between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Pontremoli passed through several regimes. Its position made complete independence difficult while preventing outside rulers from treating it as an insignificant possession. First Visconti and then Sforza influence drew the town into a political system extending from Lombardy to Tuscany.

Milan governed through commissioners, negotiated articles, privileges and local families. The division into two parts could be used to distribute offices and contain opposition, but it also generated new conflicts. An intensive documentary culture developed: notaries and chancellors translated power relations into statutes, grants, agreements and petitions.

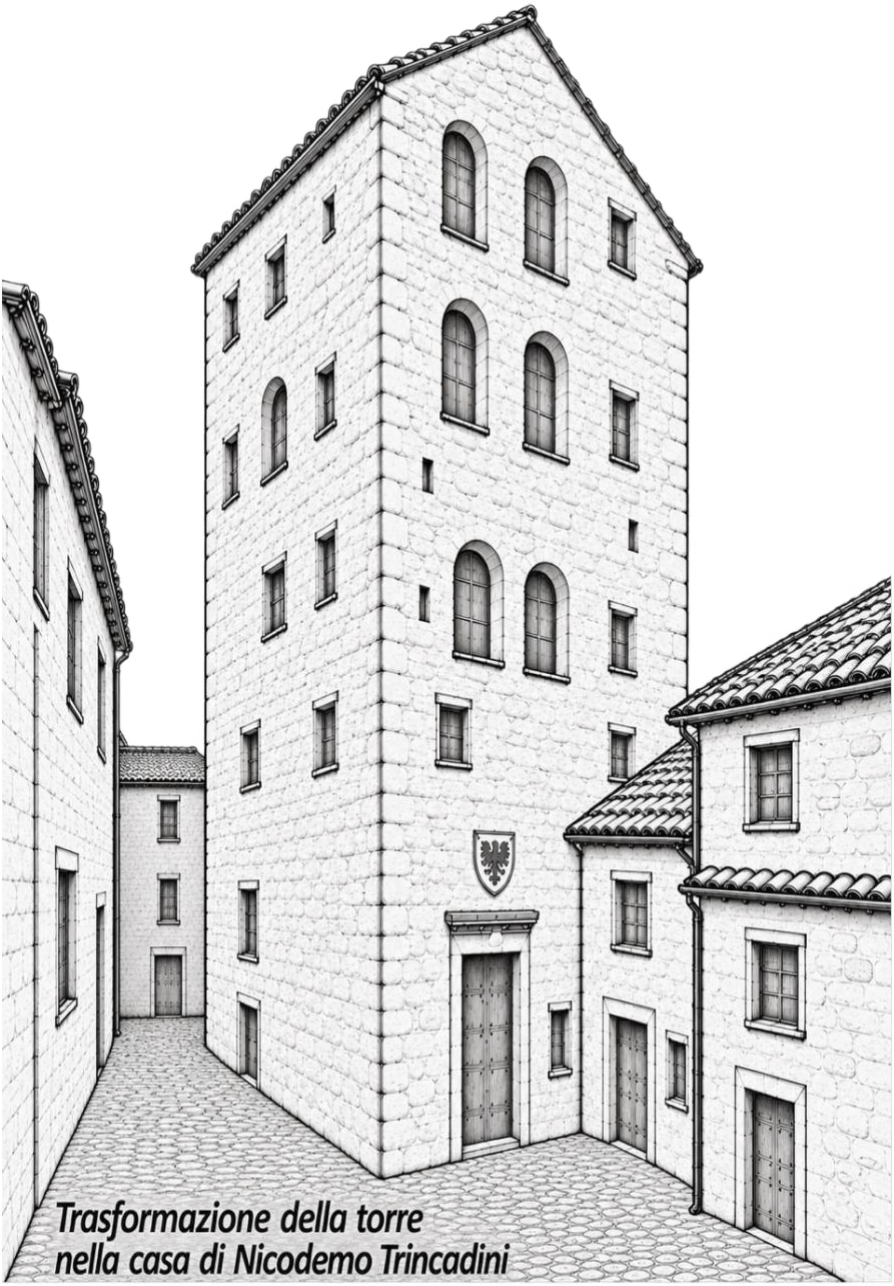
Nicodemo Tranchedini's career was therefore not an exception without roots. The young man from Pontremoli entered Francesco Sforza's service and turned skills typical of a frontier territory into diplomatic tools. He could read political alignments, preserve papers, maintain relationships and represent differing interests without confusing them. His house in Pontremoli remained a place of return for a man involved in the great Italian courts. In this sense the tower-house tells both a local and a European story: its walls belong to an Apennine town, but its owner's memory leads to Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples and Vienna.

THE TOWER-HOUSE A building older than the surviving documents

We do not know when the tower-house was built. The fire that struck Pontremoli in 1495 destroyed a crucial part of the town archives, making it impossible to reconstruct the earliest phases without gaps. Its fortified type and masonry nevertheless point to an origin before Nicodemo Tranchedini, who is its first documented owner.

A medieval tower-house combined defence, habitation and prestige. Its height made it possible to survey the surroundings; thick walls and small openings protected its rooms; the tower itself displayed the family's social standing. Over time, requirements of comfort and representation could lead to larger windows, seats built into deep walls and facilities for water.

The tower-house preserves traces of different ages rather than an untouched medieval image. Some openings were blocked, interior floor levels changed and new floors were supported by the ancient walls. The building must therefore be read as a palimpsest. Its value lies not only in the age of its stones but also in the possibility of recognising successive alterations. Changes attributable to the fifteenth century may have accompanied a shift from a mainly defensive structure to a more prestigious residence, consistent with Nicodemo's public rise. This remains a cautious interpretation: architecture provides clues, but cannot replace lost records.



Trasformazione della torre nella casa di Nicodemo Trincadini

1495 The fire, the house that survived, and tradition

In June 1495 a fire devastated Pontremoli. It deeply marked the town's collective memory because it destroyed homes and documents. In 1701 Bernardino Campi, citing an account by the notary Francesco Enreghini, identified Nicodemo's home as one of only three houses to escape the flames. Though late, this testimony was based on an earlier source and made the tower-house one of the few identifiable buildings surviving from the town before the disaster.

A tradition developed around the tower's survival: its roof was said to have been too high for Swiss soldiers to set it alight, and many inhabitants supposedly sheltered there. This account fits the exceptional character of the building, but there is no contemporary proof that would allow it to be stated as fact. The booklet therefore preserves it for what it is: a significant local memory.

Distinguishing records from tradition does not diminish history. On the contrary, it helps us understand how communities establish their relationship with places. The document of 1701 supports the survival of the house; the legend of the unreachable roof reflects a desire to explain that survival and picture the tower as a collective refuge. The tower-house matters on both levels: as a historic structure and as a vessel of memory.

1413 Nicodemo Tranchedini: birth and education

Nicodemo was born in Pontremoli to Giovanni, son of Barnaba Trincadini, and Giovanna Fondeva of Lucca. For a long time scholars gave 1411 as his birth year, deriving it from an obituary that said he was about seventy years old. Paola Sverzellati, however, drew attention to direct testimony: in a dispatch written in his own hand in December 1470, Nicodemo stated that he was fifty-seven and had served the Sforza for forty-two years. The



calculation points to 1413, now the preferable date.

The difference of two years may seem slight, but it reveals how historical research works. A source close to events is not automatically exact; a personal statement, compared with the chronology of a career, can correct a biographical tradition repeated for centuries. His surname likewise appears in different forms: Trincadini in family and local memory, Tranchedini in many fifteenth-century records.

Nicodemo received a humanist education and entered the service of Francesco Sforza in 1428, at approximately fifteen years of age. This choice took him away from Pontremoli early on. In 1431 we find him in Cremona measuring hay and grain: a practical assignment far removed from the ceremonial image of the future ambassador. These administrative tasks taught him to manage resources, people and records. Renaissance diplomacy also grew out of rigorous everyday accounting and writing.

1428–1444 From administration to political trust

The first phase of his career was spent in the service of Francesco Sforza, still a condottiere before becoming duke of Milan. On 1 June 1436 Nicodemo was appointed treasurer and general official for Todi, Tuscania and other territories. This position demanded fiscal expertise, the ability to negotiate with communities and personal loyalty to his lord.

In Todi he married Allegrezza Monaldi, from a local family, and obtained citizenship in 1437. The sources do not establish every detail of the wedding date with certainty, but they document the development of family and property ties. Nicodemo acquired real estate and strengthened relationships that would accompany him throughout his life.

In 1441 he acquired a house and lands in Pontremoli from his paternal uncle Ludovico. During the same period he became involved in the town's affairs and the agreements regulating its political relationships. On 16 January 1442 Filippo Maria Visconti made him a member of the ducal household, confirming his entry into the courtly environment. These years explain his later effectiveness as an ambassador. Nicodemo understood administration from the ground up, had interests in several cities and could turn personal trust into documents, money and alliances. He was not a literary scholar occasionally engaged in politics, but a professional mediator trained through experience.

FLORENCE AND MILAN The alliance between Cosimo and Francesco Sforza

When Francesco Sforza became duke of Milan in 1450, Nicodemo was already one of his trusted men. In the same year he received Florentine citizenship. The connection with Florence was not merely honorary: his relationship with Cosimo de' Medici became one of the cornerstones of his work.

Mid-fifteenth-century Italy consisted of states held in an unstable balance. Milan needed Florence's financial and political support; Florence viewed the Sforza as a counterweight to rival powers. Nicodemo worked between the two courts, interpreting intentions, easing suspicions and keeping confidential channels open. In 1453 he helped secure financial support of eighty thousand florins from Cosimo for Milan.

This result did not depend on one letter. Diplomacy was built on repeated meetings, personal credibility, discreet transmission of information and knowledge of when decisions could be made. Nicodemo presented the duke's interests without losing the Medici's trust. He was a mediator, not simply a messenger. The following year the Peace of Lodi opened a new phase in the Italian balance of power. It was not his achievement alone, but the daily efforts of ambassadors such as him helped establish relatively lasting alliances. In this network, the man from Pontremoli held a position far more important than the size of his birthplace might suggest.

ROME Nicholas V, the Curia and the conclave of 1455

Nicodemo was sent to Rome in 1451. The papal court was a religious, political and cultural centre. There the diplomat came into contact with Pope Nicholas V, the humanist pontiff who promoted book collecting and the project that would become the Vatican Library. His letters reveal an observer attentive not only to the Curia's decisions but also to the personalities who made them possible.

His relationship with Nicholas V confirms Nicodemo's dual identity: Sforza official and man educated in humanist culture. He moved among chancellors, cardinals and scholars and understood the political value of books and literary reputation. When the pope died in 1455, he was present in Rome and performed a custodial role during the conclave that elected Callixtus III.

Proximity to events should not be confused with sole responsibility for them. Nicodemo did not determine papal policy on his own, but represented Milan at one of Europe's most sensitive centres. His task was to gather reliable information, distinguish rumours from decisions and report swiftly to the duke. Comparing his writings with other sources allows historians to view the papacy through the eyes of a humanist from Pontremoli: a viewpoint shaped by diplomatic interests and valuable precisely for that reason.

HONOURS AND SERVICE Titles, missions and public responsibilities

Nicodemo's reputation was acknowledged by several authorities. In 1457 Emperor Frederick III made him a count palatine. In 1459 he obtained the right to quarter the Sforza arms with his own and adopted the motto Col ben far (“By doing good”). In 1460 Pius II appointed him count of the Sacred Lateran Palace. In 1471 he became a senator of Milan.

These titles were not mere decorations. They reflected a network of trust spanning Empire, papacy and duchy. Nicodemo continued to undertake embassies and appointments: Rome, Florence, Naples, Siena, Vienna and other courts feature in his activities. When Cosimo de' Medici died on 1 August 1464, Nicodemo was nearby, a sign that an enduring political relationship had also become personal.

After Francesco Sforza's death in 1466 he served Galeazzo Maria and then the ducal government. In his final years he held offices in Piacenza, Genoa, Pavia and Pesaro. His career was not an uninterrupted upward progression: changes of ruler, court suspicions, wars and illness demanded continual adjustment. His strength lay in organised memory. Nicodemo took notes, filed papers, verified information and maintained relationships. In a world where a decision might depend on news received only hours earlier, the ability to manage information was an essential form of power.

1472–1481 Final years, Pontremoli and the will

In 1472 Nicodemo returned to a steady role in Milanese administration without breaking his connection with Pontremoli. Between May and June 1473 he stayed in his native town. On 18 June, before the notary Antonio Villani, he dictated his will in the lower room of his own house overlooking the Verde. This precise location makes the document especially important: it directly links the diplomat's biography to the building.

In the following years he continued to serve the Sforza state. From 1 February 1477 he was commissioner in Piacenza; he served in Genoa in 1478, Pavia in 1479 and Pesaro between May and September 1480. Such appointments were entrusted to a man now elderly but still considered capable of representing ducal authority.

Nicodemo died in Milan in December 1481, in the parish of Santa Maria Podone, after a fever or illness. The date most often given is 14 December; a later obituary records the 15th. His burial place also remains uncertain despite the provisions of his will. Such uncertainties remind us that even a well-documented life retains shadows. What emerges clearly is the lasting bond with Pontremoli: property, family memory, chapel and house made his native town a fixed point in a career lived in motion.

A PERSONAL ARCHIVE Eight hundred and ninety-one letters preserving memory

The manuscript Riccardiano 834 preserves 891 letters and compositions dated between 1443 and 1480, almost all in Latin. Only seven texts were written by Nicodemo; the overwhelming majority were addressed to him. The codex brings together around two hundred correspondents and reveals the network underpinning his public activities.

The largest groups include 117 letters from his son Francesco, 79 from the humanist Francesco Filelfo, 63 from his brother Leonardo, a Benedictine monk, 58 from Onofrio Macari, 52 from Vincenzo Amidani, 38 from Antonio Ivani and 28 from Biagio Ghilini. These figures are not mere curiosities: they reveal the continuity of particular relationships and allow us to distinguish family, literary friendship, patronage and political service.

The manuscript is not a literary collection designed to be read as a single work. The letters are frequently arranged by sender and constitute a working archive. Nicodemo preserved requests, recommendations, news, expressions of thanks and records of favours granted or expected. The archive reveals the less spectacular side of diplomacy: remembering a promise, recognising handwriting, finding a precedent and assessing an interlocutor's loyalty. The ability to keep an archive was inseparable from the ability to act. In a system built on personal relationships, paper became an external memory and a tool of government.

DIPLOMATIC HUMANISM Francesco Filelfo and the circulation of culture

Among Nicodemo's correspondents, Francesco Filelfo stands out as one of the fifteenth century's best-known humanists. Riccardiano 834 contains 79 of his letters; by comparing other manuscripts and editions, scholars have reconstructed a total of 94 letters addressed to Nicodemo between 1451 and 1480.

Filelfo sought protection, appointments and favours. Nicodemo had valuable access to the Sforza, the Medici and the Curia. Their relationship shows that humanist culture did not circulate in a world separate from politics. Poets and philologists needed patrons; ambassadors and princes drew on scholars' prestige; manuscripts, dedications and information travelled through the same channels as diplomatic negotiations.

Calling Nicodemo a humanist means more than attributing to him a taste for Latin. His work connected people and texts. He could recognise the symbolic value of a work, choose whom to present it to and convert cultural recommendations into political capital. The correspondence also reveals tensions, repeated requests and dependencies: patronage was not selfless friendship. This very mixture makes the letters an exceptional source. Through them, the great culture of the Renaissance emerges as a tangible network of requests, travel, money, prestige and trust.

BOOKS AND PRINTING Four new books from Rome to Pontremoli

On 26 July 1470 Nicodemo sent his wife Allegrezza in Pontremoli four recently printed books from Rome: Livy's Decades, Strabo's Geography, the works of Virgil and Cicero's Letters to Friends. These editions were produced by Sweynheym and Pannartz, pioneers of printing in Italy.

The gesture is remarkable because it places the Tranchedini family at the beginning of the printed-book revolution. Nicodemo also owned numerous manuscripts and copied a list of publishing prices. He knew Giovanni Andrea Bussi, a humanist and editor of important editions. He did not abandon manuscript codices for printed volumes: he used both, recognising the new possibilities of circulation offered by print.

The four authors were not selected at random. History, geography, poetry and letter-writing together formed an educational programme close to the humanist tradition of Vittorino da Feltre. The books were intended for the household and the children's education, but also as a statement of the family's social position. A library proclaimed knowledge, connections and aspirations. This shipment from Rome to Pontremoli thus brings together the central dimensions of Nicodemo's life: travel, family, classical culture, technical innovation and care for the domestic inheritance.

FATHER AND SON The education of Francesco Tranchedini

Nicodemo paid close attention to the education of his eldest son Francesco. The letters identify three teachers: Andrea di Calabria, Onofrio Macari and Francesco Patrizi. His studies included grammar, rhetoric, Priscian, Cicero and Quintilian. Francesco asked his father for Latin and Greek books and displayed a strong inclination towards literary learning.

His father, however, was also thinking about a career. He directed Francesco towards law, a more useful discipline for administration and diplomacy. In 1464 the young man moved to Milan, joined the Sforza chancery and subsequently undertook diplomatic assignments. His humanist education was not abandoned: it became the linguistic and argumentative foundation of public service.

The relationship between father and son was not without differences. Francesco wanted letters and books; Nicodemo insisted on legal training and experience in the chancery. This very tension brings the documents to life. They do not describe an abstract educational ideal, but a family deciding how to transmit prestige and skills. The tower-house was more than property: it was a place where books, genealogy, memory and professional expectations could pass to the next generation. Through Francesco, Nicodemo's methods continued within the Sforza administration.

THE ARCHIVE-BOOK Diary, inventory, genealogy and travel companion

Alongside his extensive correspondence, Nicodemo compiled a small personal book, called in the sources a Quodlibetum, Zibaldone or Memoriale. It was a portable paper notebook designed to accompany him on journeys. Its sections contained information on the Sforza family, personal decrees, a travel diary for 1470–1479, the Tranchedini genealogy, inventories of books and objects, credits, debts and household expenses.

Its contents combine things that we would now keep separate: international politics and table linen, diplomatic itineraries and weapons, manuscripts and perfumes, works of art and household utensils. This mixture illustrates the practical organisation of courtly life. The diplomat needed to know where his papers were, which objects he had left in Milan, what had been sent to Pontremoli and what sums remained to be collected.

The archive-book was not an intimate diary in the modern sense. It was a technology of memory. It reduced the danger of forgetting and made it possible to reconstruct decisions during constant travel. Entries for 1473 also record his stay in Pontremoli. The inventories from 1466–1475 and the book lists connect high diplomacy with material objects. Nicodemo thus emerges not as an abstract figure but as a man who ordered the world by writing it down.

COAT OF ARMS AND MEMORY Col ben far, identity and family heritage

In 1459 Nicodemo received permission to quarter the Sforza arms and associated the motto Col ben far with his identity. Another emblem appearing in manuscripts shows a black double-headed eagle holding a scroll with the motto O honore and the initials N TR. Heraldry was not simply ornamental: it made visible service, privileges granted and status attained.

Part of Nicodemo's library survived through successive collections. Nineteen manuscripts from his collection passed to Count Antonio Galli of Pontremoli and were sold in 1755 to Marquis Gabriello Riccardi through Lorenzo Mehus. They included Riccardiano 541, containing works by Caesar. Other groups of documents and books now make it possible to reconstruct the diplomat's interests and relationships.

In 2022 some materials from the Ferrari collection entered the Biblioteca Riccardiana, opening new opportunities for research. Dispersal has therefore not erased memory: it has spread it among public archives, libraries and private collections. The tower-house is the most immediate physical element of this heritage, but it does not stand alone. It is connected to manuscripts, coats of arms, letters and inventories. Visiting the residence means entering a much wider documentary constellation, where every object preserves a fragment of family history.



Nicodemo Trincadini's coat of arms, drawn in one of his books (De Bello Gallico), now in the Biblioteca Riccardiana in Florence.



Historic print made in 1673 by engineer Colonel Ceruti for the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

AFTER NICODEMO The tower within the palace



The courtyard of the eighteenth-century palace, with the upper part of the tower still visible before the latest restoration.

Between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the tower was incorporated into the Galli Bonaventuri palace. This reflected a new way of living, with larger rooms, regular internal circulation routes, staircases and reception rooms. The medieval structure did not disappear but was absorbed into a larger architectural whole.

New floors altered the internal levels; some openings were closed and others adapted; vertical connections changed. A dossier in the Tranchedini Archive concerning family disputes between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries preserves copies of wills, genealogies and a coloured plan from 1742 relating to the house of San Colombano. The boundaries named in these documents—the road, the Verde and the San Colombano area—help trace the continuity of the complex, although the identification of individual building phases demands caution.

In the late eighteenth century a great stone vault was built above the main-floor salon. The new structure gave monumental character to the palace below, but cut off the tower's upper levels from the ordinary circulation routes. For more than two centuries, the top remained a single uninhabited volume. Paradoxically, abandonment helped preserve masonry and traces that more intensive alterations might have erased. The building's history is not therefore a simple story of decline: every phase removed something while also protecting something else.

RESTORATION Understanding the structure before transforming it

The restoration concerned the tower's uppermost two levels, not the entire palace. Before work began they formed a large attic volume. The walls displayed changes in masonry pattern, beam supports, blocked openings and deformations: indispensable evidence for reconstructing the building's phases.

The fourth-level floor was reinstated in the position indicated by the traces in the walls. Certain stone arches inserted at a later date no longer served a useful function and could have exerted dangerous thrusts during an earthquake. Their removal, together with the installation of tie rods at floor level, helped stabilise walls visibly deformed towards the north and south.

The aim was not to recreate an ideal medieval tower. Restoration of this kind must acknowledge that the building is the outcome of many periods. Masonry, changes of level, beam sockets and a section of the upper surface of the vault were therefore left visible. New elements make their functions clear without artificially imitating the old. Structural safety and renewed use were pursued while preserving material evidence. The tower was not returned to some imagined year zero: it was prepared for a new chapter of its history. The eighteenth-century vault built over the noble part of Nicodemo's house naturally remains in place. By contrast, the two great arches supporting the eighteenth-century roof—which had already been partly lightened during the first restoration in 1995—have now been completely dismantled to restore the fourth level of the ancient tower.



Above: the eighteenth-century vault and the two large arches supporting the eighteenth-century roof.

Below: the elegant large stone window and a window with built-in seats, typical of fifteenth-century Tuscan architecture.

They were blocked up in the eighteenth century following the construction of the adjacent roofs.



OPENINGS AND ACCESS Rediscovered windows and a walkway to the tower

The restoration reopened windows that had been blocked during different building phases: large openings, windows with seats built into the depth of the masonry, arrow slits and a carved window with a washbasin. Each tells of a different way of using light, looking over the town and organising domestic life.

Access presented the most delicate problem. The eighteenth-century vault had separated the top of the tower from the palace, while neighbouring properties limited the possible solutions. A walkway was therefore built from the stairwell on the Via Bologna side. The new element crosses the roof and makes the transition between two architectural structures—the palace and the tower—clearly legible.

Today the upper levels accommodate a historic residence. The five rooms—Cacciaguerra, Casotto, Crësa, Castelnuovo and Piagnaro—are named after places and memories of Lunigiana. The shared spaces, stairs, table in front of the great window and views turn architecture into an everyday experience. Living in a historic residence does not mean freezing it in time. It means accepting that conservation continues through maintenance, use and understanding. The new access does not conceal the complexity of the building: it makes that complexity intelligible.



A LIVING RESIDENCE Hospitality, landscape and continuity

Casa Torre Trincadini brings together two legacies. The first is material: medieval walls, eighteenth-century transformations, rediscovered openings and contemporary solutions. The second is documentary and intellectual: the memory of Nicodemo, his family, books and diplomatic networks.

The guest rooms are not arranged as museum galleries. History emerges through the experience of the spaces: a deeply recessed window, a change in level, the outline of the Piagnaro, Pontremoli's roofs and the hills of the upper valley. The room names invite visitors to continue the story beyond the building, discovering castles, villages and ancient urban divisions.

Adapting the building for hospitality restores a function to the upper tower after nearly three hundred years. It is a delicate balance: comfort must respect the legibility of the architecture; interpretation must distinguish established facts from tradition; and heritage promotion must avoid reducing a complex history to mere scenery.

The purpose of the project lies precisely in this conscious continuity. The tower-house does not claim to have remained unchanged. Instead, it demonstrates how a building can pass through time, lose functions, acquire new ones and preserve enough traces for every generation to question it anew.

N. TR.

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From Roman Lunigiana to a contemporary residence

DATE	EVENT
2nd century BC	Foundation of the Roman colonies of Luni and Lucca as part of the control of the region.
990	Sigeric records Puntremel as a stage on his return journey from Rome.
1014	A charter of Henry II mentions the stratam de Ponte Tremulo.
1160	Frederick Barbarossa stays in Pontremoli.
1167	Imperial privilege; a few months later Pontremoli prevents the army from passing.
1322	Castruccio Castracani has the Cacciaguerra barrier built.
1413	Birth of Nicodemo Tranchedini, dated from a dispatch in his own hand.
1428	The young Nicodemo enters Francesco Sforza's service.
1441–1442	He acquires property in Pontremoli and joins the ducal household.
1450	Francesco Sforza becomes duke of Milan; Nicodemo obtains Florentine citizenship.
1457–1460	He becomes count palatine, receives the right to use Sforza arms and is made count of the Sacred Lateran Palace.
1470	He sends newly printed books from Rome to Pontremoli.
1471	He becomes senator of Milan.
1473	He makes his will in his house in Pontremoli.
December 1481	Nicodemo dies in Milan.
1495	The great fire of Pontremoli; his house is remembered among the survivors.
Late 17th–18th centuries	The tower is incorporated into the Galli Bonaventuri palace and later isolated by the great vault.

The dates do not eliminate uncertainty

For Nicodemo's birth we adopt 1413, calculated from his own statement in 1470. His death is placed in December 1481; sources differ between the 14th and the 15th. The date when the tower-house was built cannot be established precisely.

Further reading

This booklet was written using the documents and studies made available for the project. Titles are reproduced in shortened form; the original PDFs contain full publication details.

- Concetta Bianca, Per la formazione di un figlio: Nicodemo e Francesco Tranchedini.
- Olga Ricci, Due vescovi, due parti, una quasi città: il Quattrocento pontremolese.
- Enrica Salvatori, La Francigena nella Lunigiana medievale: una strada da percorrere?
- Enrica Salvatori, Poteri locali e popolamento in Lunigiana fra XII e XIII secolo.
- Sandro Santini, Antico e Medioevo fra le alte valli della Magra, del Taro e del Vara.
- Paola Sverzellati, Per la biografia di Nicodemo Tranchedini da Pontremoli.
- Paola Sverzellati, Il carteggio di Nicodemo Tranchedini e l'umanesimo diplomatico.
- Paola Sverzellati, Il libro-archivio di Nicodemo Tranchedini da Pontremoli.
- Giorgio Petracco, La Lunigiana altomedievale dal confronto con le fonti.
- Niccolò V visto da un umanista pontremolese.
- Il codice Tranchedini nella Biblioteca Riccardiana.
- L'Archivio Tranchedini e la faida, research dossier on the family archive.
- Una società divisa in una terra di confine, research materials on Pontremoli.
- Davide Tansini, Pontremoli e i suoi castelli.
- Regional historic map, Dissegno di Pontremoli, Biblioteca Moreniana, Florence, Acquisti Diversi 94-1.
- Historical, architectural and photographic documentation of Casa Torre Trincadini and its restoration.



The tower before restoration