## 1486: GIOVANNI DA PISTOIA DI BARI

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## Discussion, updated and outdated

From the moment I found the quotation of Giovanni da Pistoia (1) in the book of Arnold Esch (2), a discussion began between Lothar Teikemeier and I, which we have debated for a while – as sometimes happens with us for questions of this kind.

Let me begin with my opinion, because it appears to be simpler. Many of the renowned Florentine artists and personages of the Renaissance were active in Florence, but were born more or less far from this town; just to list a few of them: Benedetto da Maiano, Baccio da Montelupo, Desiderio da Settignano, Angelo Poliziano, up to Leonardo da Vinci. Therefore, finding this Giovanni da Pistoia who brings cards into Rome, as several other Florentine merchants did, I had no problem in considering him one of them. My problem was just to find if he had also got a family name at the time, or if I had to search him just as Giovanni da Pistoia in the documents kept on the local merchants in the Florentine archives.

Lothar Teikemeier’s opinion was more complex, because it pointed to two different directions. To begin with, he considered that the Florentine provenance was not certain. «It might mean “just a Florentine merchant”, but we don’t know this. Indeed Florence could not be the only place responsible for the production of the cards. At one place Esch speaks, besides of Florentine decks, also of Northern decks, which might be North-Italian (like from Milan, or Ferrara, or other North Italian cities), but possibly also German decks, and others.» There is also present a question of dates. «We have in Florence an allowance on December 1450, and before that any export started, we likely had first to give satisfaction to the Florentine market, and a full acceptance of the new cards by the local population was necessary, before they started to be exported.»

Then, with the second, more precise, indication, he was inclined to consider Pistoia itself as the possible place for the production and the trade of the cards. «We have a Giovanni da Pistoia, and Pistoia is possibly very special in this question. Pistoia has a halfway position between Lucca or Pisa and Florence, perhaps this explains some playing card and gambling anarchy there, also better chances to get less control on cards trade. In 1446, Pistoia was a gambling nest, and local people thought of little else when they got the conservative Giannozzo Manetti (well known in the literary circles of Florence) as a governor. He was very much against gambling and organized rough persecutions».

This could be confirmed – still according to Lothar’s opinion − by some data reported on his life. «Giannozzo was governor of Pistoia and, as at Pescia, would accept neither gifts nor tributes. The place was given to gambling; hating this vice as he did, he resolved to put an end to it as long as he was there, and to effect this he issued a proclamation that whoever should play any forbidden game should be taken and treated with four strokes with a rope. Moreover, he fixed a fine which every offender would have to pay, wherefore during his time of office gambling ceased.» (3)

In the following weeks, I did not care of any provenance of the cards from Pistoia, which was hardly plausible to my eyes, and began to search among the Florentine merchants.

## Discussion, updated again

Up to now, I did not find any useful information on Giovanni da Pistoia in the Florentine archives. This may easily be considered as disappointing; however, the situation with him is not worse than for most of the other Florentine merchants quoted in Esch’s book as suppliers of goods to Rome, and playing-cards in particular.

If we search info about him using the common tools of internet searching, the task is not easy either. There we find one Fra Giovanni da Pistoia, and, whenever we find a historical personage of the church, it is understandable that he obtains more comments in the past chronicles. Another Giovanni da Pistoia easy to discover is a friend of Michelangelo Buonarroti and about him we find many quotations from literary works. Others were painters or architects. Among the various Giovanni da Pistoia, I could find however also one, who was precisely a merchant by profession. (4)

There is some shift in the corresponding dates: we met a merchant with this name in Rome in 1453, while now we find him (or another merchant with the same name!) in 1486. 33 years in the life of a man are not few − by the way, this time corresponds to the whole life of Jesus. About the age of the merchant encountered in Rome, we have no indication: he could either be a young merchant, or an old one.

However, the merchant with the same name, whom we find in 1486, could not be a young merchant, because we read (Appendix, A) that he had already married two daughters and thus we can easily imagine him as a grandfather. (5) Not only: we can read another document, written in Latin in the Autumn of the following year (Appendix, B). We can plausibly assume that *condam* in Puglia had at the time the same meaning as *quondam* had in Florence, and we thus have in October 1487 “Antona, daughter of the late Giovanni da Pistoia from Bari”. If seeing him as a grandfather in 1486 required a little imagination on our part, his death a few months later is thus properly documented.

Let us accept the idea that it is the same person in the two separate times in which we find news about him. Now, we come to the more complex and interesting part of the new finding. Indeed, there is not only a shift in the two dates; there is an unexpected shift in the two corresponding places too. We do not find him in Rome, nor in Florence, nor in Pistoia! We find him active at the time in Bari, in the far SSE part of Italy.

Not only. He is still practising his job there as a merchant, and this is not surprising. He does not work alone, but takes part in the trade within a group of fellow citizens. They import textiles, gold wires and silverware, and export olive oil and other foodstuffs. What is the most unexpected fact of them all (on the basis of the assumptions previously advanced) is that he works together with a group of members and co-partners of... Milanese provenance. In Bari, the companies of merchants had first mainly been from Venice, and then a keen competition between them and Florentine companies occurred. Later on, the Milanese obtained more freedom and support, especially after that Sforza Maria Sforza became Duke of Bari in 1464.

To find Giovanni da Pistoia together with the Milanese merchants instead of the Florentines has really been for me the greatest surprise! I am ready to take in the difference between 1453 and 1486 and also that between Rome and Bari. For my parochialism, what is harder to digest is the conclusion that the eight pack of triumphs that Giovanni da Pistoia brought to Rome in 1453 did not probably come from Florence (as explicitly mentioned for other packs later on), but very likely from Milan.

As a matter of fact, if we reflect about this possibility, it is not so strange as it could appear at first sight. We already knew that cardmakers were active at the time (including the production of triumph packs!) precisely in and around Milan. Witness in about the same years is at least twofold: both Jacopo Antonio Marcello in 1449 (6) and Francesco Sforza in 1450 (7) had the necessity to search for suitable packs of triumphs on sale, either to be sent to the Queen Isabelle in Dijon, or to be personally used in playing, respectively.

Cardmakers with a similar experience were also present around Ferrara, but in their case we have yet no evidence of a destination of their products outside of the Ferrarese court.

## Conclusion

I have outlined above two discussions instead of one, as is more common. It is not possible to exclude that in the future a third discussion will be necessary to reach the true and decisive reconstruction of the facts mentioned. With the additional information collected here, the situation may appear simplified.

One question, at least, remains however to be answered. If Milanese triumphs were distributed in 1453 into Rome, we can easily admit that the customs staff had no difficulty to tax similar packs, coming from Florence a few years later, in the same way. The question concerns however the Roman card players: if they were accustomed to use Milanese triumphs, passing to the Florentine ones was not immediate (even if one admits that the number of the cards was the same), due to differences existing in both the iconography and the order of the triumphal cards.

At present, however, it appears that not I, but Lothar Teikemeier was right in the first comments on the new information about the early introduction of triumphs into Rome. I only imagined, wrongly, that those cards came from Florence. He imagined, wrongly too, that those cards came from Pistoia. However, he comes off as the winner of the debate, thanks to his preliminary comment: “which might be North-Italian like from Milan or Ferrara or other North Italian cities, but possibly also German decks and others”. I had put all my money on a horse, while he had left few horses without a stake.

## Appendix

A) I mercanti lombardi e milanesi presero posto in Puglia, come nel resto del reame, fin da quando, negli ultimi anni di re Alfonso, con lui e con Cosimo de’ Medici l’alta mente di Francesco Sforza ebbe stabilmente costituito l’equilibrio fra gli Stati italiani. Crebbe ancora l’entrata dei mercanti lombardi in Puglia dal momento, in cui Sforza Maria ottenne il ducato di Bari, nella quale città in ispecial modo si fermarono i milanesi.

Le loro colonie, ai tempi di Ludovico il Moro, avevano acquistata la stessa importanza delle veneziane, alle quali erano state equiparate nelle libertà e franchigie di commercio; e consoli e viceconsoli milanesi risiedevano a Trani, Bari e negli altri centri di produzione e di mercato più importanti di Puglia. Il ’69 era loro console generale Pier Paolo Rotulo di Milano, l’83 era in carica Gian Giacomo de Tanci di Milano, e viceconsole in Trani Gian Antonio Carcano. Francesco Dugnano, il cui socio Giovanni da Pistoia aveva maritata una figliuola a lui ed un’altra a Francesco Scaraggi di Bitonto, era uno dei maggiorenti della colonia milanese a Bari (1486). Anch’essi importavano particolarmente pannilani, panni bergamaschi o veronesi, oro filato ed argenterie, per esportarne l’olio e gli altri prodotti agricoli. (8)

B) XXVI mensis octobris… nobili et honesta muliere Antona condam Iohannis de Pistoya de Baro et uxore Francisci Scarasii de Botonto ex una parte, et nobili viro Francisco de Dugnano de Mediolano habitatore civitatis Bari parte ex altera. (9)

## Notes

(1) <http://trionfi.com/triunfi-playing-cards-rome>

(2) Arnold Esch, *Economia, cultura materiale ed arte nella Roma del Rinascimento*. Roma 2007.

(3) <http://books.google.de/books?id=lyMQTgOuKUoC&dq=vespasiano&hl=de&source=gbs_navlinks_s> , p. 372; <http://trionfi.com/0/p/01/> .

(4) Giuseppe De Gennaro, “Le lane di Puglia nel basso medioevo”. In: M.Spallanzani (Ed.), *La lana come materia prima*. Istituto Datini, Prato 1969, pp. 149-167.

(5) Francesco Carabellese, “Saggio di storia del commercio della Puglia”. In: *La Terra di Bari. Vol. I*. Vecchi, Trani 1900. pp. 1-66.

(6) <http://trionfi.com/jacopo-marcello-letter-1449>

(7) <http://trionfi.com/0/e/06/>

(8) Francesco Carabellese, *La Puglia nel Secolo XV*. Bari 1901, p. 40. (at least in part, also in Refs. 4 and 5.)

(9) Francesco Carabellese, *La Puglia nel Secolo XV*. Bari 1901, p. 215.