# 1693-1698: MINCHIATE AT THE AQUILOTTI ACADEMY

Franco Pratesi − 26.10.2012

## Introduction

I have to inform about another result of my research in the AOIF. (1) The input for this study has been the same as for the previous note devoted to the Evangelista Academy. (2) All the antecedents here are the same as reported there. The environment is practically the same, or a very similar one. At least, the origin was exactly the same, as already indicated. Let us thus have a quick look, without further preliminary information, on another interesting company, the Aquilotti Academy, which can be considered as derived from the Evangelista Academy with the same and some new fellows.

## The Academies and Accademia degli Aquilotti

We know that in these old Company children and young men were admitted from thirteen to twenty-four years. Then they had to leave; in some cases, associated Academies were established in which adults could be accepted. The main activity of these Academies remained that of performing comedies, but other pastimes were welcome, and playing Minchiate in particular.

The Academy examined here had the name of Academia degli Aquilotti. Aquilotti or Aquilini (young eagles) was the name given to the young men of the Compagnia di San Giovanni Evangelista already in the time of Lorenzo dei Medici and Savonarola. We find again this traditional name here, applied however to grown up “young eagles”.

The Academia degli Aquilotti, precisely that of our interest, was only born in 1669, and the documents here under examination only cover the last years of that century.

## Outline of the account books kept

In comparison with the documents of the Evangelista Academy described before, (2) we find here more books kept. Three of them are similar to the three, which have been described for the Evangelista Academy. In addition, we find here a container with several receipts and various documents and no less than four further books, mainly of interest for the performances of the same Academy.

Let me first briefly mention the last four books, which may be of interest for the history of theatre, but contain no useful information on playing cards in the Academy.

11840 contains the text of the performance *L’Amore è cieco*, by Giovanni Battista Ricciardi; there are a few loose documents of later years (1699, 1711).

11841, in a fine writing on unnumbered leaves, has the text of the same performance, indicated as played for Christmas 1694.

11842 contains the text of another performance, *Il Piaccianteo* by Pietro Susini.

11845 has only four leaves written, with lists of various expenses (oil, coals, etc.) compiled by Baccio Vantucci.

The remaining four books contain material of interest to us and are described with more detail in the following.

## 11847 Ricevute e documenti diversi (1680 – 1698)

This item of the AOIF does not correspond to a book, as usual. We find instead a folder with a score of documents, of various shapes and contents. Included are some that just on sight explain the origin of the technical word of Filze, used for many collections of these documents. Indeed, Filza comes from “infilzare”, to pierce. We have here a lot of receipts, cards, small sheets of paper with any annotations. Not only they kept them one upon another in a pack, but they additionally pierced all of them in the centre and passed a string through them all; on the bottom side we find a knot, which fixes the string in its initial position; on the upper side we have a rather long string coming out, ready for piercing further receipts.

Maybe, checking all this material with attention may further provide some minor information on this Academy. Let me however limit my attention to just one of these texts, a document of eight pages, dated 1 August 1693.

I transcribe it entirely in the Appendix below. I have hesitated whether to translate it into English, but to do this correctly I had maybe to adopt an even older form of this language, than I currently use. Alternatively, I had to first translate this text in the Italian language of nowadays, which also has appeared too fatiguing to me. Let me thus just synthetically outline here the main contents of this document.

The Aquilotti Academy had been established in 1669, and on 2 February 1670 they obtained from the Grand Duke the licence to play Minchiate. The participation decreased in the following years so that they accepted new fellows, and on 7 August 1685 renovated the licence.

Now, on 1 August 1693 they accept further fellows in substitution of members cancelled or dead and compile a private document, to be considered as an official one, in which each fellow assumes the duty to pay his subscription fee for the following three years and three months (thus till 1 November 1696). After this date, the duty will be considered as confirmed year after year up to the dissolution of the Academy, unless a notice is given three months earlier. This money is intended for renting the house of their meetings and for any other expenses required for the functioning of the Academy.

To the purpose of a regular functioning several chapters must be observed as follows.

Nobody will give access to women with a bad name into the house, either by day or by night, in the occasion of parties or similar events, under penalty of cancellation.

During play, nobody of the Academics should dare to blaspheme the name of God, of the Glorious Virgin Maria, or of their Saints [literally, Italian “suoi” keeps undefined whether they belong to God or to Maria], nor to say obscene or indecent words. Academics must play correctly and be of example to persons coming into the Academy to play without being members.

If somebody tears one or more cards up, the penalty is of L.4 for every occurrence. If a players makes it more than three times he can be cancelled from the Academy. Two fellows are indicated to deal with the selection of a suitable place for the Academy; they can decide to rent another house, which they consider as more suitable.

The subscriptioin fee is L.70, followed by 1 Giulio for each month by everyone. [A coin with this name I know for Rome; however, the corresponding value should be L.2, as from the monthly fees recorded in these account books.] If one does not pay for three months, the Consul must send him a letter inviting him to pay within eight days. He is cancelled from the Academy if still does not pay.

At the end of the year, if the Academy has a debt, it must be refunded by everyone.

The social charges are Console, Camarlingo, Provveditore, and Scrivano. The Console is chosen by ballot and keeps the charge for six months. As soon as he is designated he has to name the other charges, which must be confirmed by the Academics with two thirds of the votes.

In the absence of the Console, the Provveditore can decide on his behalf, but only for expenses up to L.5. The Console will keep the key of the box; he must be present – together with the Provveditore and one of the Academics – when the box is opened every month; he must forward to the Camarlingo the list of the money withdrawn from the box and the list of the expenses; he must give to the Scrivano all documents, so that he keeps them with care and then passes them to the succeding collegue.

To give value and power to the document, every Academic will sign it the same day in Florence.

The documents thus ends with the signatures of all Academics accompanied by a legal wording as current in notary deeds. One years later, the signature of Giuseppe di Bartolommeo Panfi is added, with the same wording, in substitution of his brother (who, as we know, had died in the meantime).

## 11843 «Entrata e uscita A» (1693 – 1698) ; 11844 «Debitori e creditori» (1693 – 1698)

These two account books can be better examined together, because they contain exactly the same information, with just a change in the method of recording it.

Already at the beginning of the records, the two books were identical: 48 folios of 34x22cm, bound in parchemin with a picture of the Aquilotti on the front cover. This is again a heraldic eagle; however, differently from that found in the cover of one Evangelista book, these are two-headed, as the Austrian standard. In one book we read *Entrata e uscita*, whereas in the second book we find *Debitori e creditori*, both titles have been written in capital letters in the upper part of the covers.

The *Entrata e uscita* book has been compiled following the chronological order: day after day incomes and outcomes have been separately recorded. Incomes are recorded until leaf 9; after several blank pages, expenses begin at f.25v up to (unnumbered) f.32r. After another group of blank leaves, in the two last ones (f.47 and f.48, actually unnumbered) we find a detailed Inventory of all the furniture present in the theatre of the Academy, in Via Porta Rossa.

The *Debitori e creditori* book has the same entries arranged according to the person involved. For instance, we can find here a whole page dedicated to a given member of the Academy, with a long list of all the association fees that he had paid, month after month.

The expenses are separately listed on leaves 10, 14, 19, 22, and 30. To note that the pages of the other book have been kept unnumbered, whereas in this *Debitori e creditori* they have been numbered in an unusual way. Actually, this is similar to the common numbering as folios, two pages with the same number, but on opening the book we find the same number of folio in the page at our left and in that at our right. (The consequence is that instead of using the normal fol. 20r and 20v, I will use fol. 20L and 20R, for left and right respectively.)

What is of our main interest here is to extract from the lists of expenses the payments for acquiring playing cards. I have collected them in the Table below, with the corresponding dates. Of course, there are further useful information that can be deduced from these entries.

First of all, who was the cardmaker: here we find one and only one supplier of playing cards to the Academy: Zanobi Rossi. We know that there were several cardmakers active in Florence at the time, but this one apparently was the preferred supplier, for reasons unknown to us, about which we only can speculate (lower price, better quality, more firendly relationship, anything else).

It is for us always a favourable situation, whenever we encounter a cardmaker directly involved in the trade of playing cards; here we do not have any intermediate trade, we see the cards come directly from producer to consumer. However, we must always keep in mind that what we see in these and in any account books of card purchasers, is just a small and unknown fraction of the actual production of the cardmaker. In other words, these records are useful to get an idea of the consumption of cards in a given milieu – which may be of interest in itself − but nothing more.

Another important information is the price of a Minchiate pack at the time. In particular, whether it was kept constant in the course of time, or if it showed some change. Now, what we find is that the number of packs acquired changed rather significantly from a time to another, but the cost of a Minchiate pack was almost always of L.1 s.16 d.8 (only in one or two occurrences, near the beginning, we find a price of L.1 s.13 d.4), whichever the quantity acquired.. I will therefore not report in the Table the amount paid, even if somebody may find not so direct to calculate it, after this 1/20/12 system has been forgotten since a long time.

The cost of Minchiate packs by the dozen − which was a very common unit at the time − may be used as a useful reference: simply L.22 for a dozen; exceptionally, L.20.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| FOLIO | DATE | PACKS |
|  |  |  |
| 10L | 1693/08/31 | 4 |
| 10L | 1693/10/01 | 10 |
| 10L | 1693/10/31 | 11 |
| 10L | 1693/10/31 | 4 |
| 10L | 1693/11/30 | 8 |
| 10L | 1693/12/31 | 8 |
| 10R | 1694/03/01 | 10 |
| 10R | 1694/04/01 | 4 |
| 10R | 1694/05/05 | 2 |
| 10R | 1694/06/04 | 4 |
| 10R | 1694/07/08 | 4 |
| 10R | 1694/08/03 | 4 |
| 10R | 1694/09/03 | 4 |
| 14L | 1694/10/05 | 16 |
| 14L | 1694/11/08 | 12 |
| 14L | 1694/12/10 | 12 |
| 14L | 1695/01/16 | 12 |
| 14L | 1695/02/16 | 2+38 carte basse |
| 14R | 1695/04/13 | 8 |
| 14R | 1695/06/06 | 8 |
| 14R | 1695/08/02 | 2 |
| 14R | 1695/10/03 | 10 |
| 19L | 1695/12/01 | 8 |
| 19L | 1696/01/07 | 8 |
| 19L | 1696/02/02 | 6 |
| 19L | 1696/02/18 | 2+36 carte basse |
| 19L | 1696/03/08 | 4+36 carte basse |
| 19R | 1696/05/01 | 10 |
| 19R | 1696/06/08 | 4 |
| 19R | 1696/07/06 | 4 |
| 19R | 1696/09/10 | 4 |
| 22L | 1696/10/05 | 4 |
| 22L | 1696/12/01 | 10 |
| 22L | 1697/02/03 | 11+10 carte basse |
| 22L | 1697/03/08 | 3+4 carte basse |
| 22L | 1697/04/02 | 2 |
| 22L | 1697/05/07 | 2 |
| 22L | 1697/07/01 | 4\* |
| 22L | 1697/07/31 | 3 |
| 22R | 1697/09/06 | 5 |
| 22R | 1697/11/02 | 5 |
| 30L | 1698/01/16 | 4 |
| 30L | 1698/04/28 | 4 |
|  |  |  |

\* Value deduced from the money amount paid.

For an easier comparison with previous activity there, let me add the same Table as used for the Evangelista Academy, with the purchases of Minchiate packs indicated month after month. We find here again the expected decrease in late spring and early summertime.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| YEAR | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC | TOT |
| 1693 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 4 | 0 | 25 | 8 | 8 | 45 |
| 1694 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 10 | 12 | 12 | 66 |
| 1695 | 12 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 8 | 46 |
| 1696 | 8 | 8 | 4 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 10 | 48 |
| 1697 | 0 | 11 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 36 |
| 1698 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 8 |
| TOT | 24 | 21 | 17 | 14 | 15 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 13 | 49 | 25 | 38 | 249 |

We find here however something new, in comparison with previous times: together with the usual Minchiate packs, we assist to the emergence in this milieu of ordinary cards, or “carte basse”. There is something puzzling about it.

We observe that ordinary cards were never acquired alone – they came together with the usual Minchiate packs. This is not strange in itself. Strange is that the purchases with ordinary cards were only about one tenth of all the purchases, whereas if we verify the numbers of packs acquired the ratio increases to just one half, 124 packs compared to 249.

We get no information on the typical use of these “new” cards. Maybe they were used for family games, with the participation of friends visiting the Academy. Or new games became fashionable, as one might expect for traditional games of the time, such as Hombre, or Ombre, as it was called here. My impression is that we must take the specific time of these purchases into account: February, February and March, February and March again, in three subsequent years. It is impossible for me not to think of Carnival, or the New Year (on 25 March here), but may be wrong.

## 11846 «Riceute» (1680 – 1698)

 This receipt book has a different shape, typical of those named Vacchetta, long and narrow, 33x11cm. We find here no more than four leaves written. These receipts can be divided into two subsequent parts. The first part contains receipts of payment given for the house rented for the Academy, similar to the receipts in the corresponding book of the Evangelista Academy.

The second and last part instead contains receipts from the Academics themselves, who attest that on 6 May 1698 they have received the due part of the money obtained with the sale of the furniture, trucco, theatre furniture and so on, apparently connected with the liquidation of those activities.

This did not correspond to the end of the Academy. Maybe just to another move into a different house. We actually know that performances were still organised by the Academy for a long time afterwards, probably in another theatre.

## Conclusion

Some documents have been described on the Florentine Accademia degli Aquilotti, better known for its organisation of performances. A dozen members were grouped in a company, whose preferred pastime was to play Minchiate. We obtain new information on this environment and the local trade of Minchiate cards near the end of the 17th century.

A kind of statute has been transcribed as well, which provides an insight into the organisation of this particular environment.

## Notes

(1) <http://old.istitutodeglinnocenti.it/defi/Isis?Conf=/opt/defi/DefiConf/defi.sysn>

(2) <http://trionfi.com/minchiate-evangelista-academy>

## Appendix – Document of the Academy

A dì primo Agosto 1693

Essendo che fino dell’Anno 1669 fusse stabilito di ereggere un Accademia nella Città di Firenze sotto titolo, et nome degli Aquilotti, et che per tal effetto a fine di passar l’Ore noiose et Ozio gl’Accademici supplicassero S.A.S. a voler concedere il Privilegio di poter nella predetta Accademica giocare alle Minchiate, et che sotto li 2 febbraio di detto Anno 1669 emanasse dalla prefata A.S. benigno Rescritto a favore di detti Accademici Aquilotti di poter trattenersi a detto Gioco di Minchiate, con quel più che in detto benigno Rescritto al quale.

E vedendo i Predetti Accademici che il fervore della medesima Accademia era nel Corso degl’anni a segno tale diminuito, che dubitando non se ne perdesse totalmente il nome hanno perciò stabilito di rianimarla con aggregare alla medesima nuovi Accademici, in luogo di quelli che mancavano, et sotto li 7 agosto dell’Anno 1685 hanno riassunto il medesimo Privilegio come nella filza di Suppliche sotto N. 40 apparisce già come sopra concessoli nel predetto dì, et anno; et perché parendo a i medesimi di esser rimasti di poco numero per la morte, et mancanza dei medesimi hanno questo dì primo Agosto 1693 aggregati altri Accademici, acciò vadia innanzi tal Accademia, per non perdere ancora tal Privilegio.

Quindi è che la presente privata scritta, et Capitolazione da valere in ogni tempo, et luogo, come se fusse pubblico instrumento rogato et guarantigiato da Pubblico Notaio si dichiara che gli appiè sottoscritti Accademici sapendo non esser tenuti, né obbligati, ma volendosi spontaneamente obligare in virtù della presente, si obligorno, et obliga ciascheduno però per la sua rata solamente a tutti i debiti che legittimamente saranno contratti dalla presente Accademia degli Aquilotti per il tempo, et termine di anni tre et mesi tre, tanto per Pigione di Casa che per ogni altra spesa necessaria per esercizio, et mantenimaento di essa, quale obligazione vogliono che duri Anni tre et mesi tre da principiare il dì primo di Agosto 1693, et continuare fino al dì primo Novembre 1696. et non si disdicendo tre mesi avanti s’intenda rafferma, et confirmata per un’altr’anno, et così d’anno in anno fino a tanto che detta Conversazione, o Accademia non sarà sciolta, o abolita.

E perché la Nostra Conversazione deve passare il tempo giocondamente senz’offesa dell’Altissimo si formano l’infrascritte Capitolazioni quali si devono infallibilmente er inviolabilmente da ciascheduno Accademico osservare et perciò saranno dai medesimi sottoscritte.

Che niuno Accademico ardisca, sotto qualsisia pretesto o colore si di notte come di giorno introdurre nella Casa dell’Accademia Donne di cattiva fama, in occasione di feste, o altro che si facessero in detta Accademia, alla pena della Rasura ad arbitrio del Console senza poter pretendere rimborso di sorte alcuna dello speso nella compra delle masserizie, et altro.

Che in occasione del Gioco nessuno Accademico ardisca Bestemmiare il nome di Dio, et della Gloriosoa Vergine Maria, ne dei suoi Santi, ne dire parole sconce et disoneste ma veda di stare decorosamente giocando per dare esempio a quelli che vengono nella Conversazione a giocare quali non sono Accademici, et questo sia, a cura del Console pro tempore, vigilare, et ammonire chi incorressi in simili scandescenze, et quando si desse il Caso che qualcheduno degl’Accademici stracciasse una, o più Carte, ipso facto s’intenda incorso in Lire quattro di pena toties quoties si desse il Caso, senza poter essere graziato né dal Console, né da nissun altro ma sia cura del medesimo fargliene dar debito al Camarlingo, et quando incorresse più di tre volte in questo errore di stracciar carte possa essere arbitrariamente gastigato dal Console fino alla Rasura senza poter pretendere rimborso alcuno come sopra.

Inoltre i predetti Accademici danno facoltà alli appresso di poter condurre a Pigione la Casa dove si deva radunare la detta Accademia, et dovendosene da detta uscire per essere misera, o altro sia cura dei medesimi et di tutti gl’Accademici intendere dove fusse habitazione a proposito per il nostro servizio, et trovata che fusse con il parere degl’Accademici la fermino, promettendo di rilevargli, et conservargli indenni da tutto quello che per tal conduzione ne potessero patire.

Nomi dei conduttori

Sig. Bernardino di Giovanni Battista Filippini

Sig. Giovanni Antonio Francesco d’Innocenzio Sassi

Siccome vogliono i Predetti Accademici, et a tale effetto si obbligano di dare, et pagare in mano al loro Camarlingo che sarà eletto la somma et quantità di Lire settanta per ciascheduno per una volta tanto, et di poi similmente sotto nome di titolo di Tassa pagare ogni mese un Giulio per ciascheduno per doversene servire per le spese di Pigione et altro, che alla giornata occorreranno per mantenimento della medesima et non pagando tre Mesate, o tanta somma che faccia tre Mesate deva il Console monirlo per lettera della quale se ne faccia copia al Quaderno dei Ricordi con dargli tempo otto giorni a pagare, et non seguendo il pagamento s’intenda decaduto dall’Accademia senza poter pretendere rimborso di sorte alcuna di quello havessi speso non vietando però ad alcuno degl’Accademici il poter pagare anticipatametne tutta l’annata, o altra somma anticipata, et alla fine dell’Anno si devino rivedere i Conti, et se l’Accademia havesse contratto debito, si deva dagl’Accademici per rata porzione mettere in pari, et se vi fussero avanzi si deve primieramente restitutire a tutti gl’Accademici le Tasse, et se vi fusse altra somma si spenda a prò dell’Accademia o in altro modo come parrà al Corpo della medesima non s’intendendo però che detto obbligo passi et si trasferisca negli Eredi, ma in caso di morte, che Dio non voglia, s’intenda qualsisia libero da tal obbligazione, et avendo figlioli, o fratelli, che voglino subentrare nel luogo del Defunto non possinbo essere ributtati, ma sieno ammessi, et godino il Privilegio dell’Entratura del loro Autore.

Et per buon governo nostro, et che le cose camminino con buon ordine è necessario che tra di noi ci sia sempre un Console, Camarlingo, Provveditore et Scrivano, l’Elezione del qual Console deve farsi da ciascheduno degl’Accademici, col scriver ciascheduno il nome di quello che gli parrà più atto a tal Carica, et quando tutti havranno scritto; il Console vecchio, o Provveditore scopra dette Polizze, et vegga, et osservi quello che sarà stato nominato più degl’altri, quello s’intenda rimasto per nostro Console, et non volendo detto accettar tal carica sia tenuto dare Lire tre per il Rifiuto et habbi il divieto di mesi sei, et accettando duri la sua Carica solo sei mesi; et fatta tal Elezione deve il medesimo eleggere uno per Camarlingo, uno per Provveditore et uno per Scrivano col mandargli un per volta a partito in corpo degl’Accademici, et sia vinto per i due terzi ciascheduno di detti et non volendo anco ciascheduno di essi accettare devin pagare per il Rifiuto Lire due, et abbin divieto anch’essi sei mesi. Avvertendo che non si possa far partito alcuno senza l’intervento di due terzi degl’Accademici et perché il numero sia più sufficiente che sia possibile s’impone di pena a ciascheduno di detti che non interverrà a i partiti, purché non sia fuori della Città o infermo, soldi dieci, mentre non fussero in numero sufficiente, ma essendo più dei due terzi et che si possa fare il partito allora non corra punto alcuno; siccome vogliamo che ciascheduno dei Partiti da farsi in nostra Accademia sempre sien vinti per i due terzi, et perché le cose camminino bene vogliamo che il nostro Console sia da tutti obedito, et rispettato come conviene et per ciò sia cura allora del Provveditore far invitare il Corpo degl’Accademici per venire a quelle resoluzioni che parranno più opportune per il gastigo di chi incorresse in si fatto errore; et in mancanza del Console il nostro Provveditore sia quello Lui che ordini, et dovendosi fare spese ne deva dar parte al Console, et a tutti, perché la sua autorità non si estenda se non a spendere la somma di Lire cinque senza darne parte.

Di più denari dal nostro Console tener la chiave della Cassetta de Pallai et una ne deve tenere il Provveditore et far votar detta Cassetta alla sua presenza, del Provveditore et di uno degl’Accademici ogni mese et consegnare al Camarlingo la nota delle spese fatte in detto Mese, et la somma di denaro che avranno cavato da detta cassetta, et deva consegnare in mano allo Scrivano ancora, tutte le nostre scritture, et Libri, acciò ne tenga buon conto, et che alla fine della sua carica le possa consegnare al nuovo.

Et perché tanto le cose sopra esposte et enunciate abbino forza, et vigore di valida obbligazione sieno rigorosamente osservate, ciascheduno degli appiè sottoscritti obliga le sue persone, Eredi et Beni, et Beni dei suoi Eredi presenti, et futuri in ogni miglior modo sottoponendosi ai loro respettivi Fori et per corroborazione la presente sarà sottoscritta di lor propria mano questo dì et anno sopradetti in Firenze.

Io, N.N., affermo et prometto, et mi obbligo a quanto in questa si contiene et in fede mano propria. [This wording is written by everyone together with his signature.]

Bernardino Filippini

P[adre] Andrea Perati

Antonio Averani (firma di P.Andrea Perati a suo nome, perché a Napoli)

Francesco Maria di Domenico Rossi

Clemente d’Antonio Zurli

Baccio Vantucci

Michele Celandri

Giovanni Maria Panfi

Bartolo di Marco Bartoli

Giovanni Domenico del quondam Giovanni Battista Miccinesi

Giovanni Antonio Francesco di Innocenzio Sassi

Antonio di Francesco Berzini

1° Agosto 1694

Giuseppe di Bartolommeo Panfi (per fratello Giovanni Maria Panfi)