

*Il libro rosso seghreto di Bongianni Gianfigliuzzi: Famiglia, affari e politica a Firenze nel Quattrocento.* Luciano Piffanelli.

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The autograph manuscript of Bongianni Gianfigliuzzi's *Libro Rosso segnato "A" seghreto* (Secret red book labeled "A") was discovered by Vanna Arrighi in 1997 in the archive of the Congregation of the Buonuomini of San Martino of Florence. Gianfigliuzzi (1418–84) is principally of interest for his wide-ranging mercantile career, beginning in the 1430s, and for his political role as a prominent supporter of the Medici family

from the 1460s. The *Secret Red Book* is Gianfigliuzzi's detailed, first-person record of his own life, comprising both periods of his career. Arrighi published an initial study of the text and of Gianfigliuzzi's activity in collaboration with Francesca Klein (now comprised in the latter's *Scritture e governo dello stato a Firenze nel Rinascimento: Cancellieri, ufficiali, archivi* [2013]), and Luciano Piffanelli has now picked up where they left off.

Piffanelli's rich, comprehensive study, published in the *Memoria Familiare* series of Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, includes chapters on the Gianfigliuzzi family, on Bongianni's career and travels as a merchant, and on his increasingly important political role in the Medici regime. These are followed by a study of the manuscript, a critical edition of the text, an appendix of archival documents, and chronological tables that coordinate year by year Bongianni's employment and the offices he happened to be holding, with his numerous purchases of real estate.

Giuliano Pinto's preface correctly describes the *Secret Red Book* as "neither a *Libro di famiglia* — since the history of the Gianfigliuzzi family receives little attention — nor a book of household accounts" (xi). Yet, as is so often the case with these autograph Florentine books, the text comprises material that is common to both forms of record keeping, and to others as well. It is, of course, a mark of the individuality of Florentine writers of vernacular *ricordanze* and *memorie* that their works fit only loosely within the typologies that scholars have attempted to construct. In the present instance, clearly the author cared about his family and its history; however, as Piffanelli demonstrates, Bongianni came from a lesser branch of the Gianfigliuzzi, so that what stands out in Bongianni's book is the extent to which he documents a rise in Florentine society that resulted from his own initiative. Others from the Gianfigliuzzi family are mentioned but they are not the subject of significant attention. Piffanelli tells us what little he can about Bongianni's three wives, but they seem to have mattered little in his record of achievement. *Parentadi* (in-law relations) were sometimes an important factor in social advancement (or survival) in fifteenth-century Florence, but not so here. Although Bongianni's beginnings were hardly auspicious, by the 1470s he had become the unquestionable leader of his *consorteria*, with a massive palazzo under construction next to the church of Santa Trinita along the Arno River. Not filio Pietism but pride in the author's accomplishments characterizes the *Secret Red Book*.

In Bongianni's interactions with the Medici there is again an emphasis on talent and achievement, rather than on honor, favor, and family tradition. When Bongianni became active in the Medici regime in the 1460s, many of the Florentines who had assisted the Medici in their rise to power were already disaffected, leading ultimately to a crisis in 1466, when the Medici narrowly escaped an attempt to overthrow them that was led by some of their former partisans. Bongianni thus offered the Medici a fresh voice and fresh talents at time when these were needed. He was amply rewarded: in 1470, shortly after Lorenzo de' Medici came to power, he had Bongianni knighted as a Cavaliere a Spere d'Oro. Unlike so many of the *creature* who were advanced by the Medici, Gianfigliuzzi presented himself not as an inferior who owed everything to their

patronage, but as a reliable person of technical prowess who understood what was required in a given situation.

Piffanelli does fine work tracing Gianfigliuzzi's extensive but not unusual experience in his twenties and thirties in mercantile ventures in Northern Africa and the western Mediterranean. The Florentine patriciate was more outwardly poised than is often assumed today, and more so than those of other Italian states in the Renaissance. Columbus and Caboto were not the names of patrician families; Vespucci and Verrazzano were. And yet, in a typical Florentine pattern, once Bongianni returned home, he invested his wealth in land, which is to say in his urban palazzo and in a series of farms and *poderi* that were acquired in the Val di Pesa.

Scholars who want a detailed and reliable survey of the recent work that has been done on Florentine family history should consult Piffanelli's careful introduction. Anyone who wants to explore the burgeoning and complicated maze of connections, contracts, and officeholding responsibilities of a successful fifteenth-century Florentine, from that Florentine's own point of view, could do no better than to study Bongianni Gianfigliuzzi's *Secret Red Book*.

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