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TRADE AND DIPLOMACY:
THE GINORI FAMILY'S TRADING NETWORK
IN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA (1660-1700)

1. *Family Affairs: the Ginori brothers as agents and consuls in Spain and Portugal*

«Continuamente io conoscendo e toccando con mano li honori e grazie che giornalmente ricevo dalla Altezza Vostra Serenissima contro ogni mio merito, vedendo dalla gentilissima sua di Dicembre 1669, li felicissimi auguri nella compagnia che sono per fare con li Tempi e Corsini»...¹

The few lines quoted above are an excerpt from the reply that Lorenzo Ginori, Florentine merchant in Lisbon, sent to Cosimo de' Medici in early 1670. Between 1668 and 1689 the correspondence between the two is plentiful². The explanation for such a great number of letters lies in the nature of their relationship: Lorenzo Ginori was the Grand-duke's agent in Portugal. His letters from Lisbon contain a great deal of information about local economic and political issues. As a granducal agent, Lorenzo periodically provided the Florence's court with fresh news. However, the letter quoted above deals with a very specific topic: the formation of a trading company which Lorenzo was launching with the members of two noble families, the Tempi and Corsini, actively engaged in trade³. Once learned of the

¹ ARCHIVIO DI STATO DI FIRENZE (henceforth ASF), *Mediceo del Principato* (henceforth MDP), 5063.

² I am referring specifically to the correspondence belonging to the collection known as *Mediceo del Principato* in the State Archive of Florence. In the private archive of the Ginori family there is also a set of letters that Lorenzo and his brothers addressed to the Grand-duke during the years in which they operated as consuls and agents in Spain and Portugal. These letters go under the name of *Corrispondenza granducale* in order to distinguish them from the family's private and business correspondence.

³ Lorenzo Ginori along with his trading partners intended to form a *società in*

new enterprise, the Tuscan prince wrote to Ginori to congratulate him and to wish a successful outcome to him and his partners. Ginori, in turn, kindly replied to Cosimo, thanking him for his constant help and support. But this was not the formal exchange of pleasantries between a prince and one of his subjects who discharged agency functions abroad. By expressing his delight and approval for the new commercial enterprise, the Grand-duke showed the importance of his role as the final referee of the system of investments in foreign trade set up by the Florentine mercantile elite⁴, in which the Tuscan prince himself often took fully part. On his side, Ginori fully acknowledged the Grand-duke's role in boosting, with his power, help and suggestions, the businesses that the Florentine merchants carried out in foreign countries. The role of Cosimo as the balancer of a complex system of information, business and diplomacy, which tightly bound the activities of a certain number of Florentine economic operators, is visible in the way the latter expressed his opinion; gave his advice; and proposed his own views of market trends and possible perturbing factors. But the undertone of the above-mentioned letter also hints that the relationship between the two was characterized by a good degree of familiarity and trust. This finds confirmation in many other letters that they exchanged with regularity for more than twenty years. The rich correspondence provides us with an extremely apposite point of departure for the analysis of the role of the Ginori family within the transnational web of agents set up by the Grand-Duchy of Tuscany to achieve its political and economic goals and to serve its network of cultural exchange across Europe and farther afield.

Even from an initial and loose analysis of the correspondence, it is possible to grasp that these relations were built on a set of ele-

accomandita (a limited liability partnership) whose main purpose was to explore the marketability of Tuscan textiles – especially silk and wool fabrics – in the Iberian kingdoms and in their overseas colonies. The Tempi brothers, Francesco e Benedetto, had tight bonds with the Ginori. They formed with Lorenzo's brothers, Francesco e Girolamo Ginori, with Folco Rinuccini and Piero Niccolini a trading company which participated in the trade with Spanish America. Francesco e Girolamo, who operated in Cadiz, were the company's general partners. See: M.G. CARRASCO GONZÁLES, *Comerciantes y casas de negocios en Cádiz (1650-1700)*, Cadiz 1997.

⁴ The Grand-duke used to invest large sums in foreign trade, especially in the colonial trade of Spain and Portugal, and he did so through the trading houses of Florentine merchants active in Seville, Cadiz and Lisbon. See: CARRASCO GONZÁLES, *Comerciantes y casas de negocios*; N. ALESSANDRINI, A. VIOLA, *Genovesi e fiorentini in Portogallo: reti commerciali e strategie politico-diplomatiche (1650-1700)*, «Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche», 28 (2013), pp. 295-332.

ments such as trust, reliability, honorability, and reciprocity. Lorenzo enjoyed his prince's trust and confidence since when the latter visited the Portuguese capital in 1669⁵. When, in 1674, Lorenzo was appointed consul of the Florentine nation in Portugal his relationship with the prince, who in the meantime had become Grand-duke as Cosimo III, strengthened.

But who was Lorenzo Ginori? Which was the role that he and his brothers played in the Tuscany's international system of trade, information and diplomacy?

Lorenzo was the son of Carlo Ginori, member of a noble family from Calenzano – a small village in the Tuscan countryside – who had moved to Lisbon in search of fortune. Most of Carlo's sons got involved in trading activities of some sort, especially in the Iberian peninsula. In the second half of the 17th century Lisbon, Cadiz and Seville became the nodal points of the family's trading network, which stretched from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean and included some of the briskest economic areas of the world. The Ginori family had links with a large number of economic operators across Europe and had agents in the territories of the *Estado da Índia* and in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in America.

Lorenzo settled in Lisbon, where he operated as a merchant and agent until 1689. After a good deal of years in Portugal, serving both the interests of his family and those of the Grand-duke, Lorenzo returned to Tuscany. He ended his career as a public officer in the Florentine administration. He was appointed *Provveditore della dogana* of Leghorn and by the end of his life also earned the title of *senatore*⁶.

⁵ Between 1668-69, Cosimo de' Medici travelled throughout Spain and Portugal. In Lisbon he met several Florentine merchants (among whom Lorenzo Ginori, Giovan Francesco Poltri e Filippo di San Gallo) and with them he discussed the possibility of enhancing the economic relationships between Tuscany and the Portuguese crown. First-hand accounts of this travel were written by Lorenzo Magalotti, Filippo Corsini and Giovanbattista Gornia, who accompanied the future Grand-duke. Magalotti wrote the official chronicle of the journey, whose manuscript is currently kept in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence. See: L. MAGALOTTI, *Viaje de Cosme de Médicis por España y Portugal (1668-1669)*, edited by A. Sánchez Rivero and A. Mariutti de Sánchez Rivero, Madrid 1993; A.M. DOMÍNGUEZ FERRO, *El relato de la estancia en tierras de Castilla-La Mancha de Cosme III de' Medici en una crónica inédita*, in *El tema del viaje: un recorrido por la lengua y literatura italianas*, edited by M.J. Calvo Montero and F. Cartoni, Cuenca 2010, pp. 673-685.

⁶ L. PASSERINI, *Genealogia e storia della famiglia Ginori*, Florence 1876; A. VIOLA, *Lorenzo Ginori: console della nazione fiorentina e agente del Granduca di Toscana*

Lorenzo's brothers had trajectories not so different from his; most of them operated as merchants in the key-places of the Iberian Peninsula and worked as the Grand-duke's agents. Along with the daily management of the family business, the Ginori brothers discharged the role of consuls in the places in which they operated, and they were also involved in diplomatic negotiations⁷. They participated very actively in the political maneuvering of the Grand-Duchy of Tuscany and in the making of its strategic alliances with the Iberian kingdoms. As consuls the Ginori family members discharged a number of functions which went far beyond the accomplishment of trade-related tasks within the mercantile community that they represented in Spain and Portugal, and the provision of sideline diplomatic services. In early modern Europe consuls performed a host of tasks that transcended diplomacy as such and their role was hardly categorizable even according to coeval rules and practices inherent to royal emissaries and ambassadors⁸. As recent historiography has emphasized, «tout au long de l'époque moderne, le statut du consul demeure ainsi dans une relative opacité qui entretient les ambiguïtés»⁹. The Ginori brothers who represented the Florentine nation in Cadiz and Lisbon were involved not only in mere commercial and economic activities – like the ordinary administration of their business or the resolution of disputes arising within the community –, but they also acted as privileged observers of the political and economic life of the countries in which they lived and operated. As their correspondence with the Florentine court shows, they possessed a rare combination of socio-economic insight – mostly deriving from their personal skills as merchants and from their familiarity with the local culture and social practices. The fact that they spent long periods of time in the Spain and Portugal made them almost bi-

in Portogallo (1674-1689), in *Di buon affetto e commercio. Relações Luso-italianas na Idade Moderna*, Lisbon 2012, pp. 163-176.

⁷ Lorenzo's brothers – Niccolò, Giovan-Francesco, Bartolomeo and Francesco – also discharged consular functions in Lisbon and Cadiz.

⁸ Scholars have pointed out how early modern sources about diplomatic practices usually neglected the role of consul and, when any mention about them was made, they were often referred to as figures of little relevance devoted to lesser issues than diplomats. See: H. LEIRA, I.B. NEUMANN, *The many past lives of the Consul*, in *Consular affairs and diplomacy*, edited by J. Melissen and A.M. Fernández, Leiden 2011, pp. 225-246.

⁹ G. POUMARÈDE, *Consuls, réseaux consulaires et diplomatie à l'époque moderne*, in *Sulla diplomazia in età moderna. Politica, economia, religione*, edited by R. Sabatini and P. Volpini, Milan 2011, p. 196.

cultural subjects¹⁰ and this characteristic was often recognized by the political elite with whom they had contacts, as an additional asset which made them able to fulfill sensitive tasks which other individuals with a less fluid identity would have not been able to¹¹.

The Ginori brothers were individuals working the complex and not-easy-to-handle machinery of international trade and politics, who also functioned as cultural and political brokers. They embodied certain qualities of representation and communication, which made them apt to serve the interests of their country and to mediate between different political entities. Because of these features, the Grand-duke entrusted some members of the Ginori family with special missions. They served, thus, as referees for certain sensitive political and diplomatic issues in which Tuscany was involved. The most significant case in which the Ginori brothers were actively involved as Tuscan representatives was the possible creation of two trading companies for the Indies¹². One was to be formed with the Spaniards and one with the Portuguese. Both companies were originally conceived as joint stock companies slightly patterned upon the English East India Company and the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*. When negotiations with the Portuguese crown were initiated, lacking a Florentine official diplomatic representative in Lisbon – there was no granducal

¹⁰ Francesco Ginori, who operated in Cadiz, applied for a *carta de naturalización* and received it in 1687. Francesco and Girolamo Ginori did not return to Florence, but remained in Spain until their death. On the acquisition of nationality by naturalization of foreign merchants in Spain see: A. DOMÍNGUEZ ORTIZ, *La concesión de naturalezas para comerciar en Indias durante el siglo XVII*, «Revista de Indias», XIX (1959), 76, pp. 227-239.

¹¹ In an undated letter that Lorenzo Ginori addressed to the Grand-duke (ASF, *Auditore dei Benefici Ecclesiastici* [henceforth ABE], 5686, Scrittura C), he recalled how during a semi-official talk with D. Pedro, the latter told Ginori that he knew that he was Florentine, but he had Portuguese blood («dicendomi che conosceva che io era fiorentino ma tenevo sangue portoghese»). The reference that the Prince Regent made to the fact the Lorenzo had Portuguese blood is particularly interesting. Ginori was born to a Florentine father and mother and thus did not have Portuguese origins. However, the long years spent in Lisbon and his familiarity with the Portuguese culture had probably made him a bicultural subject who could easily move from one culture to another. D. Pedro's words represented a public recognition and legitimation of Ginori's biculturalism, which was emphasized as an additional talent which could prove crucial in the context of the negotiations taking place between the Portuguese crown and Tuscany for the formation of a trading company for the Indies.

¹² On the formation of a Luso-Florentine trading company, see: ALESSANDRINI-VIOLA, *Genovesi e fiorentini in Portogallo*, and VIOLA, *Lorenzo Ginori*, pp. 163-176.

ambassador to the Portuguese court – Lorenzo Ginori acted as a privileged referee and was received by D. Pedro – the Prince Regent – to talk about the project and the new commercial opportunities that it could bring to both nations¹³.

Apart from discharging consular functions, the Ginori brothers also worked as the Grand-duke's agents. Therefore, an important part of the activities that they carried out in Spain and Portugal was devoted to satisfy the Tuscan prince's recurrent quest for exotic «rarities»; to handle his relationships with local elites and to redistribute the gifts that Cosimo III sent to the Portuguese and Spanish royal courts for noblemen, clergymen and other members of the courtly elite¹⁴. When writing about those groups of agents who participated in the building of the Medici art collections, E. Goldberg noted that they included a number of extremely heterogeneous individuals with very little in common. He, therefore, came to the conclusion that the term «agent» was hardly definable and could be applied to «anyone who was recognized as in some way in the service of the Medici»¹⁵. M. Klebusek, in an attempt to find a comprehensive definition of who was an agent in the early modern period, pointed out that the word referred to a function rather than to a profession with specific and immediately identifiable characteristics. In spite of any disagreement about who was an agent and how it is possible to find common features for this figure, there is little doubt that the agent's function «within the early modern distribution system of information, power, services and products»¹⁶ was crucial. In early modern Europe agents

¹³ ASF, ABE, 5686, Scrittura A-B.

¹⁴ A broad scholarly literature accrues around the topic of gift-giving in Early Modern Europe. The classic work remains N. ZEMON DAVIS, *The gift in sixteenth-century France*, Madison 2000. On practices of gift exchange in the specific context of early modern diplomacy, see: D. CARRIÓ-INVERNIZZI, *Gift and diplomacy in seventeenth-century spanish Italy*, «The Historical Journal», 51 (2008), pp. 881-899; M. JANSSON, *Measured reciprocity: english ambassadorial gift exchange in the 17th and 18th centuries*, «Journal of Early Modern History», 9 (2005), pp. 348-370; A. LOOMBIA, *Of gifts, ambassadors and copy-cats: diplomacy, exchange and difference in early modern India*, in *Emissaries in early modern literature and culture: mediation, transmission, traffic, 1550-1700*, edited by B. Charry and G. Shahani, Farnham 2009.

¹⁵ E.L. GOLDBERG, *Patterns in late Medici art patronage*, Princeton 1983.

¹⁶ M. KLEBUSEK, *Profiling the early modern agent*, in *Your humble servant: agents in early modern Europe*, edited by H. Cools, M. Klebusek and B.V. Noldus, Hilversum 2006. See also from the same author: *Double agents in early modern Europe*, in *Double agents: cultural and political brokerage in early modern Europe*, edited by M. Klebusek and B.V. Noldus, Leiden 2011.

offered a vast array of services: they were engaged in the gathering and transmission of political news; were employed on diplomatic missions; and negotiated varying commercial, cultural and intellectual dealings between patrons and clients. Likewise many other 17th century agents stationed all over Europe, the Ginori brothers were at the crossroad of multiple domains of economic and cultural interaction where complex processes of mediation and negotiation took place.

As providers of exotic and much sought-after luxury goods for the Tuscan court, they discharged an extremely important function of cultural intermediation, helping strengthen the interest for products coming from far-away lands and enlarge Medici's art collections. The Grand-duke's quest for plants, fruits, animals, gemstones, artworks and other objects from Asia, Africa and the Americas were part of consolidated socio-cultural practices of collecting, consuming and displaying «rarities» and «curiosities» whose origins can be traced back to the 16th century *Wunderkammer*¹⁷. As a collector, Cosimo III was not only eager to possess specimens of rare animals and plants from distant regions, but also *chinoiseries* of every sort and other «strange things» from overseas lands. In early modern Europe, merchants, along with other figures who frequently travelled like missionaries, diplomats and court artists, forged networks of exchange within which objects flowed, were traded, consumed and displayed¹⁸. As merchants engaged in trade with the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, the Ginori were at the core of intersecting networks of economic and cultural exchange which allowed them to supply the Grand-duke with all the products he eagerly requested. They used the resources of their trading-network and their personal relationships to find the products that Cosimo III desired to acquire. In the correspondence between the Grand-duke and the Ginori brothers there are many references to the products the latter shipped to Leghorn in response to the requests of the Tuscan prince. In 1675, for instance, Lorenzo Ginori

¹⁷ P. FINDLEN, *Commerce, art and science in the early modern cabinet of curiosities*, in *Merchants and marvels. commerce, science, and art in early modern Europe*, edited by P.H. Smith and P. Findlen, Abingdon 2002, pp. 297-323; L. LEVY PECK, *Consuming splendor: society and culture in seventeenth-century England*, Cambridge 2005; P. FINDLEN, *Possessing nature. Museums, collecting, and scientific culture in early modern Italy*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1994; V. CONTICELLI, *Guardaroba di cose rare et preziose: lo studiolo di Francesco I: arte, storie e significati*, La Spezia 2007; M. BUCCI, *Lo studiolo di Francesco I*, Florence 1965.

¹⁸ On the role of merchants as collectors and cultural intermediaries, see *Merchants and Marvels*.

purchased a certain quantity of amber, ivory and *belgioino*¹⁹ and sent them to Leghorn²⁰. In 1696, Francesco Ginori sent from Cadiz to the Florence's court, 365 pounds of the best cocoa he could find²¹. In a letter dated 7th October 1675, the Grand-duke even asked Lorenzo to look for a young black or Brazilian man who was able to process sugarcane²² and send him to Florence. Those mentioned above are just few examples of the great amount of exotic products, especially plants and animals – most of which, sadly enough, did not survive the long journey from their places of origin to Florence – that the Ginori brothers shipped to Cosimo III. All these products fostered the intellectual curiosity of courtly elites and became part of collections, gardens and museums. The Ginori family, therefore, was part of that highly stratified system of cultural exchanges which forged patterns of collecting and consuming luxury goods within European courts throughout the 17th century. They also developed personal interests in some specific foreign artistic objects and collected not only for the Grand-duke but also for themselves. The most interesting case is that of Lorenzo Ginori, who was fond of Chinese porcelain and eagerly collected it during his stay in Lisbon. He used to purchase porcelain through his agents and/or Portuguese merchants in Macau and Goa. His love for porcelain marked the family's fate, as from the 18th century onwards the Ginori's name became internationally known for the porcelain manufacturing company that Carlo, Lorenzo's son, established nearby Florence²³.

¹⁹ *Belgioino* was a term commonly used in Italian to refer to the Benzoin resin, which is a balsamic resin obtained from the bark of trees belonging to the genus *Styrax*. Benzoin was brought in Europe from Indonesia, and was a coveted product because of its multiple uses as a fixative in perfumery, as an antiseptic with expectorant properties in medicine and in the conservation of food – it retarded the acidification process. In the Italian medical books of the 16th and 17th centuries it is often mentioned the benzoin oil – *oglio di belgioino* – which could be used against several diseases. See, for instance, *Del compendio de i secreti rationali* by Leonardo Fioravanti, published in Venice in 1571.

²⁰ ASF, MDP, 5064.

²¹ ASF, MDP, 5071.

²² ASF, MDP, 5064.

²³ On the Ginori's porcelain manufacturing company, see: M. BURRESI, *La manifattura toscana dei Ginori: Doccia 1737-1791*, Pisa 1998; C. GINORI, *La manifattura Ginori a Doccia*, Florence 1867.

2. *Trade and Diplomacy in the Ginori family's network*

The role that the Ginori brothers performed as agents and consuls, and their involvement in political and diplomatic issues cannot be separated from the commercial activities that they carried out in Spain and Portugal. The two aspects – the provision of consular and agency services and the management of the family trading businesses – were, in fact, tightly bound and highly complementary. The businesses that the Ginori brothers set up implied the management of a solid and far-reaching trading network, which was sustained by the socio-political relations that the family had established in Florence and the Iberian peninsula. These relations helped the family place itself in the places where it operated and served as an effective tool to broaden their commercial activities. The close ties with the Florentine court, in particular, proved to be an extremely useful resource which could be successfully employed in case of difficulties as an additional ‘warranty’. It was perceived and used as a sort of shield, which protected the family enterprise from some of the perils typical to a competitive economic environment marked by a high degree of uncertainty.

An enlightening example of how the close contacts with the Grand-duke resulted particularly helpful for the Ginori's trading-house can be found in some of the letters that Lorenzo and Cosimo III exchanged between 1678-79. In that period the Florentine merchant was growingly worried about the unjust treatment he was given as consul by the Portuguese authorities. He complained that he was not treated like the other consuls in Lisbon and begged for the Grand-duke's intervention. The latter was not deaf to his agent's request and interceded in his favor. Lorenzo's cause was also pleaded by Father Antonio Vieira to whom Cosimo III had turned in search of aid²⁴. In October 1679, again on request of Lorenzo Ginori, who feared the competition of Genoese economic operators within the Italian community in Lisbon²⁵, the Tuscan prince sent the Count of Ericeira²⁶

²⁴ ASF, MDP, 5065.

²⁵ On the Genoese presence in Lisbon and the competition between Genoese and Florentine, see: N. ALESSANDRINI, *La presenza Genovese a Lisbona negli anni dell'unione delle corone (1580-1640)*, in *Génova y la Monarquía Hispánica*, Genova 2011, pp. 73-98, and EAD., *Os italianos na Lisboa de 1500 a 1680: das hegemonias florentinas às genovesas*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Universidade Aberta, Lisbon 2010, 2 vols.

²⁶ Luís de Meneses (1632-1690), count of Ericeira, was a prominent political figure in 17th century Portugal. He is especially known for his attempts to revive Portuguese economy and for his projects for improving domestic manufactures of wool

a letter. He asked the Portuguese nobleman to patronize and help the Ginori trading-house as a way to return the favor that the Grand-duke himself had done to Ericeira sometime before²⁷.

Another similar case, which clearly shows how the close relations that the Ginori brothers maintained with Cosimo III represented, under certain circumstances, an efficient instrument to protect their commercial activities, was the confiscation of Bartolomeo Ginori's²⁸ possessions in Spain. Lorenzo's younger brother, who operated in Cadiz and Seville was accused, in 1683, of being a spy on behalf of the French king, Louis XIV. All his properties were confiscated by order of Carlo II and the Florentine merchant found himself in a very difficult position. The reasons why Bartolomeo was charged with espionage are not totally clear. What it is known is that the Grand-duke's prompt intervention – Cosimo III threatened to expel the Spanish consuls in Tuscany if Bartolomeo Ginori was not allowed to retake possession of his properties – saved the Florentine merchant from further problems and allowed him to return to his business with little damage for his reputation and credibility²⁹.

The frequent support that the Grand-duke gave to the Ginori family is fully acknowledged by Francesco Ginori in a letter that he sent from Cadiz to Florence in 1674. He wrote as follows: «In ogni parte riconosce la mia casa, le maggiori obbligazioni che deve a Vostra Altezza Serenissima, mentre da per tutto viene patrocinata con quest'af-fetto»³⁰.

and silk, whose main goal was to make the country less dependent from foreign textiles. He served as *Vedor da Fazenda* and *deputado da Junta dos Três Estados*.

²⁷ In 1678, the count of Ericeira had turned to Cosimo III asking him to make pressure on the Holy See in favor of Father Bluteau. The latter was supposed to leave Portugal, but Ericeira still needed his expertise and help for improving the Portuguese silk industry. On the collaboration between R. Bluteau and Ericeira, see C.A. HANSON, *Economy and society in Baroque Portugal, 1668-1703*, Minneapolis 1981.

²⁸ Bartolomeo Ginori was born in 1653. From 1679 onwards he operated in Spain, where he acted as the Danish consul in Seville and as the consul of the Florentine mercantile community in Cadiz. He moved then to Lisbon, where he died in 1723. See PASSERINI, *Genealogia e storia*; F.J. ZAMORRA RODRIGUÉZ, *War, trade, products and consumption patterns: the Ginori and their information networks*, in *War, trade and neutrality. Europe and the Mediterranean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, edited by A. Alimento, Milan 2011, pp. 55-67.

²⁹ PASSERINI, *Genealogia e storia*.

³⁰ ASF, MDP, 5063.

By reading between the lines of Francesco's letter, one can perceive not only the gratitude that he clearly expressed, but also an underlying sentiment of affection towards Cosimo III which went beyond the typical master-agent relationship. In effect, the rich epistolary material which has been produced by the Ginori family, suggests that its members were linked to the Grand-duke by multiform and strong ties. The analysis of the correspondence between the Ginori brothers and Cosimo III testifies that their ties with the latter were based on the previous links that the family had established with the Florentine court, but were further reinforced by the complexity and importance of the network of commercial, social and diplomatic relationships that they managed. Such network was embedded in and served the purposes of the much larger granducal system of socio-economic connections across Europe.

By looking closer at the Ginori's network, one can note that it was characterized by a number of 'hubs', identified by specific places and specific anchorages³¹. In Portugal and Spain the Ginori brothers had a large number of trading relations with other Italian economic operators. In Lisbon the Italian community of which Lorenzo Ginori and his brothers were fully part used to cluster around the *Igreja da Nossa Senhora do Loreto*³². The family firm's records show that the Ginori cooperated with other Florentine merchants in Portugal, among whom Giovan Francesco Poltri (he often appeared in Lorenzo's business correspondence as well as in other coeval sources as one of his close trading partners). They also had several links with members of the Genoese mercantile community in Lisbon³³. Other merchants of different nationality were also part of the Ginori's trading network. In Spain, above all in Cadiz, the Ginoris were tightly linked to other Tuscan merchant families whose economic interests they often managed. Outside the Iberian peninsula the family had agents and trading partners in Genoa, Antwerp, Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Barcelona,

³¹ In the jargon of network analysis the word "anchorage" identifies an actor or a group of actors who keep the network rooted in a specific place, by virtue of their position within the local socio-economic fabric. See M.O. JACKSON, *Social and economic networks*, Princeton 2008; J.L. PODOLNY, K.L. PAGE, *Network forms of organization*, «Annual Review of Sociology», 24 (1998), pp. 57-76.

³² The *Igreja do Loreto*, as it is often abbreviated, was the heart of socio-cultural life of the *nação italiana* in Lisbon and all the merchants belonging to the Italian community resident in town used to pay a tax to the church.

³³ On the relationship between the Ginori trading house and Genoese merchants, ALESSANDRINI-VIOLA, *Genovesi e fiorentini*.

just to mention the most important hubs of its network. But the Ginori's trading network stretched beyond European borders and was served by several agents in Goa, Macau, Brazil and in the Spanish American colonies.

The relationships that they forged and maintained with their vast web of agents and commercial partners were not only mere economic ties established in order to secure business activities and maximize profits. Most of the economic relationships that the Ginori built within their trading network were underpinned by specific social bonds. The significance and the function of these bonds are pretty visible in the forms of cooperation that the Ginori established first of all with other Florentine merchants, who represented, for self-evident reasons, their favorite commercial partners. The long list of *società in accomandita* that they established with their country fellows is perhaps the most suggestive indicative of the nature and importance of these socio-economic relations.

The cooperative relations that they built during the years in which they operated in Spain and Portugal were stable and flexible enough to allow the family enterprise to quickly respond to market modifications and needs. They provided stability, necessary to work in an environment marked by strong competition and uncertainty. Colonial trades were, by definition, unpredictable; failures and bankruptcies were quite common. The Ginori brothers, in their correspondence with the Grand-duke, often reported about the difficulties in which many trading houses found themselves and the delays in the return of the fleet, which jeopardized the activities of many merchants, undermining their reliability. By virtue of the solid socio-economic ties they had forged and successfully maintained for the long years during which they were active as merchants, the Ginoris were able to cope with an increasingly difficult economic environment without losing credibility and with little economic losses³⁴.

³⁴ By the early 18th century, the Ginori trading house in Cadiz had serious difficulties because of the unfavorable conjuncture. As a consequence, Francesco Ginori suffered recurrent verbal attacks against his person and his company because of the rumors about the Ginori's alleged insolvency spread by some of his trading partners. Francesco, however, was able to pay back all his debts and successfully maintained his company's reputation and reliability. See: M.G. CARRASCO GONZÁLEZ, *Comerciantes y casas de negocios*, and EAD., *Los instrumentos del comercio colonial en el Cádiz del siglo XVII (1650-1700)*, Cádiz 1996.

3. *Conclusions*

Foreign trade, as many historians following Braudel's line of inquiry have signaled, was crucial to European economy in the 17th century. Very often political maneuvering and diplomatic actions aimed at maximizing commercial benefits. The overlapping of diplomacy and trade frequently favored those operators who acted both as agents-merchants and as representatives of some sort of their country. In these regards, the case of the Ginori family is particularly interesting as they operated at the intersection of different economic and political interests.

In the second half of the 17th century, Tuscany sought to reinforce political ties and trade relations with neighboring states. The Iberian monarchies were at the top of the agenda and the strengthening of the long-standing economic links the Grand-Duchy had with them, appeared as an important goal to achieve. The Ginori brothers, with their multiple interests in the Spanish and Portuguese trade and their position within the local socio-economic fabric, were perceived as the «best men for the job». Their involvement with political issues shaped their business and, at the same time, proved a wonderfully effective additional tool which secured their commercial activities. As it has been shown in the previous sections, the close relationships with the Grand-duke influenced the trading activities of Ginori family and in some cases prevented them from suffering major problems and losses. However, it must be noted that if the tight links with the Grand-duke shaped their activities to a great extent, it is also true the other way round: the private interests that the Ginori brothers had in the Spanish and Portuguese colonial trade influenced Tuscany's international political strategies and diplomatic actions.

The first and most evident way in which they exerted their influence was the transmission of news and political views from the place in which they operated. By providing the Florentine court with fresh political and economic information, the Ginori brothers directly contributed to the formation of certain points of view and opinions within the Tuscan government. After all, what they conveyed were not neutral facts but their views of political events and economic trends. The process of filtration to which information was subject before it reached Florence was highly dependent on the actors who produced and transmitted it. In these regards, the most enlightening example of how the Ginoris influenced the grandducal policy through the transmission system of information they managed, is the creation of the already men-

tioned trading companies for the Indies. The creation of these companies, whose main purpose was to safeguard the interests of the many Florentine merchants who heavily invested in the Spanish and Portuguese colonial trades, were proposed precisely by the Ginori brothers. The family, in fact, hoped through the formation of such companies to protect and broaden their commercial activities. Moreover, some members of the Ginori family, like Lorenzo and Francesco, were directly involved in the diplomatic negotiations with Spain and Portugal.

The family's correspondence, and above all Lorenzo's letters offer an insight into the close relation between the family's business and the consular and diplomatic role that some family played over the years. Moreover, the correspondence shows the family's *modus operandi* in the gathering and channeling of information and helps us understand in which way the Ginoris influenced Tuscany's international policy and consequent diplomatic actions.

In hindsight, the activities of the Ginori family appear profoundly linked to the political and economic goals that Tuscany strove to achieve on the international scenario. But at the same time, it seems that the Ginoris were able to a certain extent to bound these goals to their personal views of the then economic conjuncture, which were, in turn, directly linked to their own commercial interests. More or less evident forms of manipulation of the information conveyed and the use of dissimulation characterized several parts of the correspondence that the Ginori brothers exchanged with the Grand-duke-especially those letters regarding the formation of the already mentioned trading companies for the Indies. As Baltasar Gracián y Morales put it: «vivese lo más de información, es lo menos lo que vemos; [...] La verdade ordinariamente se ve, extravagantemente se oye; raras veces llega en su elemento puro, y menos quando viene de lejos; siempre trae algo de mixta de los afectos por donde passa»³⁵.

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³⁵ B. GRACIÁN Y MORALES, *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, in *Obras completas*, edited by A. Del Hoyo, Madrid 1960, p. 75.