

History of the oldest register of the Monte di Pietà di Bologna (1473-1519)

Libro Giornale, which cover was made also out of older materials (such as three parchments from a liturgical code in Latin, written in late Caroline in the 12th century, and several computational papers written in vernacular in the 15th century, sketched by a merchant's hand with a handwriting called precisely "mercantesco"), contains financial records ranging from April 23rd, 1473, to December 31st, 1474, and between December 3rd, 1504, and June 31st, 1519. The manuscript bears a cross † as an archival signature. The signum crucis normally opened a series of accounting books characterized by an ordered sequence of alphabetic signatures affixed to the registers preserved in chronological sequence (and consequently, in alphabetical order), since they were each marked by a signature, as shown for instance in the case of Libro Giornale and Libro Mastro related to the assets of the Torfanini Family, administered by Monte di Pietà di Bologna.

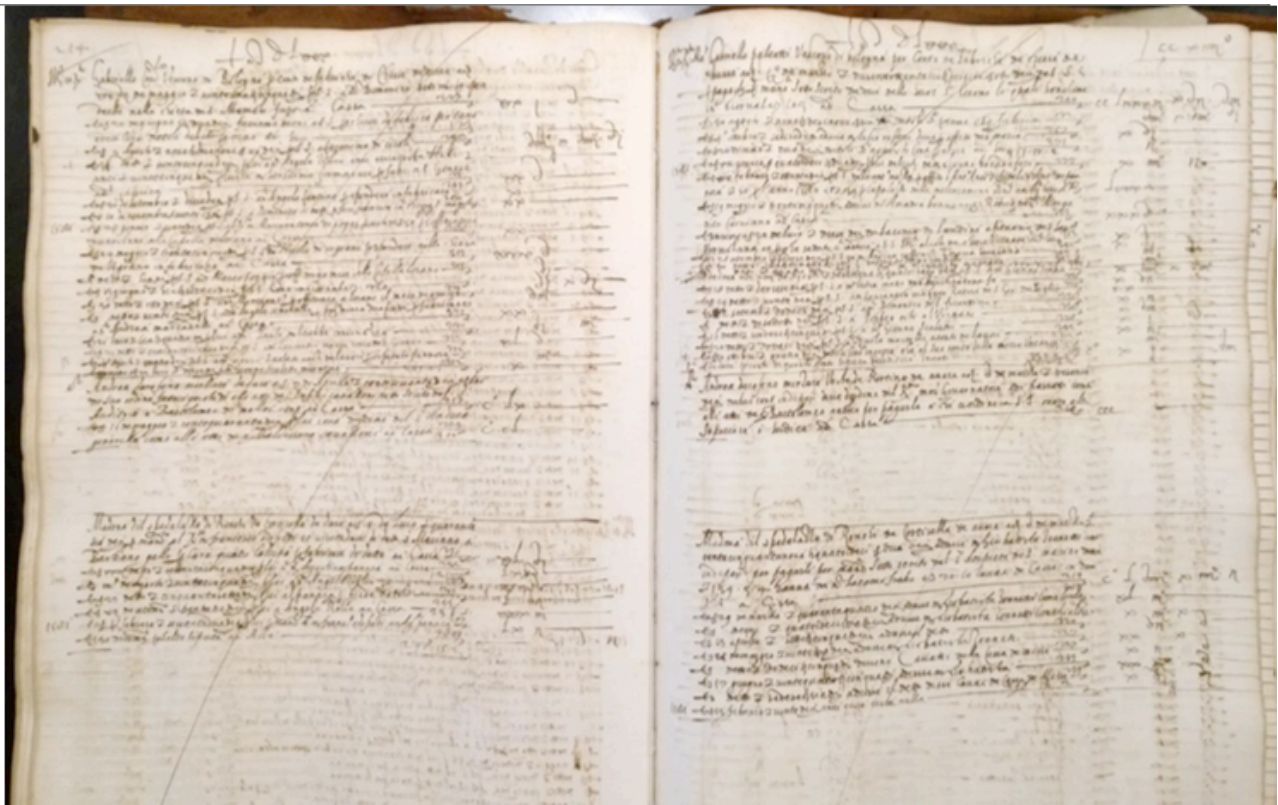


The *Libro Giornale* is the first of an unbroken series of 56 volumes that cover a very wide chronological arc, from 1473 to 1808. This type of financial books is called *Libri Giornale* and constitutes, along with another series of 57 books called *Libri Mastro* which cover the same time frame, the main source for reconstructing the financial history of Monte di Pietà di Bologna; they were, from the beginning, produced by Monte di Pietà and kept in its archive. In *Libro Giornale*, the accounting operations were recorded chronologically, following the double-entry method. The items, once closed, were quashed, made inactive, through *biffatura*, which immediately made aware (in a visible manner) of the closing of a deal, and the account lot was canceled. As a rule, each item referred to the papers in a *Libro Mastro*, and to other analytical books no longer preserved today, because selected for waste in the Modern Age.

Each register is marked with an archival signature represented by a letter that doubles or triples at the end of each alphabetical sequence. Such signature is replicated, among with the manufacturing year of the volume on the cut of each book. That custom was necessary since, being those volumes of remarkable consistency, size and weight, they were preserved leaning horizontally on the surface of the shelves of closets that formed the archives. Moreover, in the cut of each register, given the prestige that Monte di Pietà held in the city during the Modern Age, a representative depiction of Monte di Pietà was stamped, .ie the iconography of the *Imago Pietatis*.



Another peculiarity that characterizes this type of book consists in the numbering system. The numbering of the "pages" took place attributing the same number to both left and right hand entries of the open pages, juxtaposing in the upper margin, in a specular way, a Roman number and an Arabic digit. Next to *Giornali*, *Libri Mastro*, also known as *Campioni*, document the activity of the Monte di Pietà through registered accounts. Also in this case, each account is formed by two specular sections, debit and credit. In it, every item contains causal, reference to other books, monetary amount in Italian liras, soldi and denari. The following digital reproduction shows a *Libro Mastro* of Monte di Pietà di Bologna, with open register referring to the year 1580, showing in the upper left margin of the first of the two pages (verso) the numbering in Arabic "214", and, in the upper right margin (recto) the same numbering but expressed in Roman "CCXIII^o" (the term folio is understood). Pawns canceled through *biffatura*, that is through a transversal line of pen, are also evident. Entries collected under the title of the bishop of Bologna, that is to say, concerning Gabriele Paleotti.



The Prologue of *Zornale* is written in medieval Bolognese and represents a manifesto of the mercantile culture developed within the Italian Comuni and the religious motivations of a solidaristic and charitable nature germinated within the Bolognese entrepreneurial society, as well as religious and social issues, urged by the Franciscan friars of the Order of Observant Minors and brought to both believers and public authorities in occasion of their preachings. The sermons of the Observants friars, as is known, were not infrequently the origin of the *Monti di pietà*, in a historical moment in which the urban Welfare was supported by religious bodies, corporations, confraternities and testamentary legacies of lay people, to whom, in substance, were entrusted the initiatives addressed, as in the specific case, to support the weaker classes, "pauperes pinguiore", that is to say the less affluent urban socio-professional strata, if not poor, such as artisans, shopkeepers and retail merchants, who could get from this initiative, in a moment of contingent crisis, the resources to withstand the highs and lows of the economy through a financial instrument such as the loan of money on pawn, an alternative to that proposed by the Jewish banks. The prologue is handwritten by Bolognese merchant Giovanni Bolognini; the style reflects the writing activity of the professional category so much that it has taken the name of "mercantesca". Bolognini was the first governor of *Monte di pietà di Bologna*, which, as said, was born over the emotional drive aroused in a group of wealthy men coming from the city's entrepreneurial classes by the words spoken by Minor Observant friar Michele Carcano from Milan. The action of Bolognini was assisted and supported, starting from the month of July, by that of Battista Manzoli, who was the first depositary of the *Monte*. Cloth and textile production benefited from this activity; in fact, we find tailors, dyers, hemp and wool workers, but also masons, fishermen, shoemakers, blacksmiths, bakers, not only from Bologna, among those who resorted to *Monte di pietà di Bologna*. After twenty months of activity, the first experience of a *Monte di pietà* in Bologna had to be considered concluded.

The *Monte* shut down in 1474 for lack of resources, to reopen definitively after thirty years, on December 3rd, 1504, following the preaching of the Minor Observant friar Bartolomeo da Novara. After a few months, Bologna passed "from the hands" of Giovanni II Bentivoglio to those of Pope Julius II. A new and long political and administrative-institutional season would open up for the city, lasting three hundred years, within the Papal States. What really amazes is that the testimony

of that 15th century embryonic and aborted experience has not been lost, as one might honestly expect. As a matter of fact, the papers describing the Monte lending activity between 1473 and 1474 were not forgotten, abandoned, perhaps exactly because of their symbolic value, their deep idealistic reason. What is certain and remains unquestionable is the fact that the initial folders, now useless from an accountancy point of view after three decades, were not only not "thrown away", nor were they reused for other purposes, but were instead bound in solidarity with the folders that, since 1504, had received the recordings that marked the definitive resumption of the activity of Monte di pietà di Bologna until the advent of Napoleon's troops in the city, but that's another story.