

6 Market Space Strategies

6.1 Organization of Trade

The term “network”, which has figured very much at the centre of economic history in recent years, is not used in the study submitted here for the relations between Curia-based banks and their correspondents in Germany. The simplest characteristic of a network is the fact that all merchants connected in a system benefit from one another. However, there was no commercial contact whatsoever and no exchange of information between the Bueri banking family in Lübeck and the Rummel banking family in Nuremberg. There were no networks across national borders. There was no solidarity and absolutely no community awareness within the business system of the Medici, Alberti, and Spinelli.²⁰⁵⁷ Instead of a network, the correspondent structure was made up of individual relationships. The organization functioned via the Curia-based bank as a central hub from which all external relationships originated in a spoke-like system. Therefore, the concept “hub and spoke” is more apt than “networking”.

There were – with the Medici, Guarenti, Alberti/da Uzzano, and Borromei – independent subsidiaries of the Curia-based banks in Germany, endowed with equity capital and able to conduct business in their own names only during the Council years in Basel. The Medici-Bagliioni-Bueri entities in Lübeck and Alberti-Biliotti entities in Cologne were hierarchically dependent entities which could be described as agencies. They drew their equity capital from the *corpo* of a parent subsidiary. All other business relations went from the Curia to correspondents, who were not legally or organizationally dependent on their partners.²⁰⁵⁸ By foregoing their own companies in Germany, the Curia-based bankers were able to increase their profit prospects, while at the same time reducing expenditure and risk. In this constellation, the transport problem, the problem of providing the counter values for the bills of exchange, and the turnover problem were completely transferred to the partners in Germany. To reduce risk, limits were stipulated on the amount of the bills of exchange and deadlines were set for the delivery of the money in Bruges or Venice. The Curia-based banks opened *nostro* or *loro* accounts for direct exchange transactions for only a few trusted associates. Most clients were only allowed to issue bills of exchange if they were guaranteed by Florentine banks in Venice or Bruges. Through these *lettere per commissionem*, the Curia-based banker delegated risk control to the place where the flow of goods from the North could be closely monitored. Many additional details of cooperation were regulated in long letters; they were not notarized in any case that

2057 Selzer/Ewert (2010), p. 30.

2058 For an introduction to how these correspondent systems functioned, see Leone (1988).

is known. It was stipulated, for example, which bank employees were authorized to sign a bill of exchange; and, contrary to all Italian banking practices, bills of exchange had to be sealed. In summary, a distinction can be made between three forms of collaboration between German and Florentine bankers. (1) The first and largest group was made up of German merchants who agreed to cooperate with the Italians in the international banking centres and bought from them bills of exchange for their customers at home to other places or used the Italian payment system to settle their accounts between different markets. (2) A second group of merchants had, thanks to their permanent presence in Venice or Bruges, acquired so much creditworthiness with the Florentines that they were allowed to write in Germany bills of exchange to Rome and to other locations outside the German payment system. These transactions were settled in places where both enterprises were represented. (3) The closest form of cooperation came about when Germans were in a direct correspondent relationship with Florentine banks in Rome and the settlement of the transaction took place without having necessitated bank guarantees in Venice or Bruges.

6.2 Sectors of Business

The range of financial services offered by the Curia-based banks and the Florentines living in Germany was dominated by the transfer of money by means of the bill of exchange. In this way, the pope's collectors or those of the Council of Basel transported the collected moneys to the Apostolic Chamber or to the financial administration of the synod. High clergy thus paid the annates that were due and people travelling to Rome or living there were provided the needed cameral ducats from Germany. Italian bankers knew of additional possible uses of the bill of exchange, though they only rarely or never brought them into play in Germany. Apparently, only the Council-based banks of the Alberti and Medici were involved in arbitrage business.

The concentration on transferring money through the Curia-based banks is the reason why commercial bills of exchange for credit creation were without importance within Germany. This was not part of their business model in Italy either. As Michael North has noted, the commercial bill of exchange was not used by Hansa merchants, who – aside from a few exceptions – only worked in Bruges.²⁰⁵⁹ Northern Germans did not need Italians to generate cash by means of drawn bills of exchange, because they had their own financial instruments.²⁰⁶⁰ Upper German enterprises, such as the Paumgartner and the Humpig companies, availed themselves of the

²⁰⁵⁹ North (1999), p. 44; Stefke (1999), p. 36.

²⁰⁶⁰ Stark (2000), p. 104.

Florentines to pay for goods between Bruges and Venice and also to have credit limits set up for them.

As far as payment methods are concerned, a distinction must be made between large orders, sometimes amounting to several thousand Rhenish florins, and the bulk business of many small bills of exchange. It was not particularly difficult, at least in the fifteenth century, to find a banker in Germany who was able to transfer small amounts of money. Although the Nuremberg banker Müllner had unlimited authority and would have been able to give his compatriot Gartner up to 2,500 ducats, the actual amounts of bills of exchange remained very modest: the majority were for less than one hundred ducats.²⁰⁶¹ The servitia payments of the archbishop of Cologne, which came to 15,000 Rhe. fl., as well as a few other large transfers, are great exceptions. The bill of exchange as a money order or traveller's cheque were also named *lettera di credito* by Raymond de Roover.²⁰⁶² This conceptual differentiation, however, cannot be found in contemporary sources.

The most important clients of the Basel Medici bank were the cardinals and bishops among the participants of the Council, who were readily granted large loans. Cardinal Hugh Lancelot of Lusignan was granted a loan of 1,100 gold ducats in 1435, for which the bank received as a guarantee the revenues from the Abbey of Montevergine at Avellino.²⁰⁶³ In the promissory letter, the transaction was called a *nomine meri et amicabile mutui*, which is nothing more than a euphemism for loan: needless to say, the Medici did not want to forgo a profit. Four months later, the same prelate received a loan of 2,000 gold ducats, for which he gave as a guarantee various bills of exchange issued to banks in Venice with a total value of almost 4,000 ducats.²⁰⁶⁴ The fact that no notary was brought in in either of these agreements shows how important trust was. Indeed, although the contracts were written on parchment, the personal signature of the cardinal sufficed as legal notarization. This procedure had the advantage of making the transaction significantly faster and more discreet. Sometimes a simple payment commitment on paper was enough.²⁰⁶⁵ The archbishop of Milan, on the other hand, had to issue a drawn bill when he took out a loan from Tommaso Spinelli.²⁰⁶⁶ The services of notaries were rarely

2061 See Weissen (2021), p. 568. – The figures from the analysis of the exchange transactions in the Datini archives can be considered in comparison: on average they amounted to about 350 ducats. Amounts of less than 200 ducats were very rare. This is evidence that bills of exchange were not used for arbitrage. Reference from Reinhold C. Mueller.

2062 Roover (1963), p. 110.

2063 Camerani Marri (1951), no. 105, p. 47.

2064 Camerani Marri (1951), no. 111, p. 49.

2065 Examples of such simple payment commitments: ASFi, MAP 93, no. 606: Bishop Martial Formier of Evreux pledges to pay back a loan in Lyons (2 July 1434). See ASFi, MAP 139, no. 119.

2066 YUSA 90, 1700, Franciscus Piccolpasso, Archbishop of Milan: *miser Francesco, arcivescovo di Milano, costui n'abiamo obligato per sua lettera di cambio, e scritto l'altra è douda a Milano*. Published in Weissen (2021), pp. 523–527. – The representatives of the Teutonic Order in Basel had to commit to repayment in Bruges for each of their loans. See Forstreuter/Koepfen (1973), p. 737.

used by the Medici and the Spinelli for prelates.²⁰⁶⁷ Not all loans to ecclesiastical princes were for large amounts, for even prelates sometimes ran out of small change and had to borrow a few florins from the bankers. Vital de Mauléon, bishop of Saint-Pons and patriarch of Alexandria, once borrowed 25 Rhe. fl.: *i qua' li prestamo*.²⁰⁶⁸

For the banks, there was a risk of running into liquidity difficulties if loans were not repaid punctually. So, the Medici in Basel could no longer expect any money from a bishop who had lost his seat in Volterra, as he did not even have enough to support himself: *perchè à fatica di vivere*.²⁰⁶⁹ Therefore, it is understandable that the *maggiori* in Florence were worried when they heard that their countrymen in Basel had problems with clients with large debts. In December 1434, they requested from Roberto Martelli information about a loan of 2,550 ducats that had been granted to two unnamed cardinals. Martelli reassured them that he had already got 1,000 back and had sufficient collateral for the rest. Moreover, he said that the Medici had so many friends that this loan could not possibly be lost.²⁰⁷⁰ Under pressure from headquarters, the bankers relentlessly collected the debt. Roberto Martelli admonished even Cardinal Aleman with blunt words because of a large debt. He told the cardinal that his behaviour was very bad and that he had to see to it that the Medici would not be further inconvenienced concerning the outstanding money: *Ò detto al chardinale quanto questo v'è grave e che dovrebbe provvedere di non farvi oramay più incomodità dei vostri danari*.²⁰⁷¹ Nevertheless, his eminence had to put the banker off for a month, because only then did he expect to receive 5,000 ducats, which he promised to pay back in full.

In de Roover's opinion, the Italian companies dreaded lending to the high nobility because doing so went hand in hand with very high risks, as the example of the Bardi and Peruzzi in England had shown. However, they found it difficult to forego transactions with princely courts, for that was where they wanted to sell their luxury products.²⁰⁷² The Florentines in Germany did not have this problem, as there were not yet the splendid residences as found in Italy, France, Hungary, and England. There is no evidence of substantial loans from the Bueri, Rucellai, or Biliotti to German sovereigns. They left these transactions completely to German merchants and conducted credit business only on a manageable local scale.²⁰⁷³

2067 For example: Camerani Marri (1951), no. 102, p. 46. YUSA 90, 1700. Published in Weissen (2021), pp. 523–527. For a loan of f. 80 to Cardinal Domingo Ram: *miser Domenico, chardinale di Termo, abbiamo sua scritta obliigatione*.

2068 ASFi, MAP 131 C, c. 4r.

2069 ASFi, MAP 104, no. 60, c. 599. Published in Weissen (2021), pp. 497–508.

2070 ASFi, MAP 20, no. 50: *Abiate per fermo che quelli debitori ci si son fatti aranno fine buono e presto, e per l'avenire farò ongni cosa per non ne far più*. Published in Weissen (2021), pp. 485–488.

2071 ASFi, MAP 20, no. 50. Published in Weissen (2021), pp. 485–488.

2072 Roover (1963), pp. 2–3.

2073 In the 13th century and at the beginning of the 14th century, the Roman kings were still regular clients of Florentine bankers. See Weissen (2006).

In the urban economy, the Medici and the Borromei in Basel granted small loans to spice and paper merchants, chandlers, goldsmiths, dressmakers, barber surgeons, tailors, straw hat makers, and many others, who are mentioned in the merchants' documents. Butchers made up a strikingly large group among their debtors. In 1433 and 1434, *Ruedi, Ans Puchel, Hans Smel, Burchardo, Obize Glauche, and Sechinger* borrowed money from them.²⁰⁷⁴ The reason for these loans is certainly the greatly increased demand for meat in the city during the Council.²⁰⁷⁵ This change in the market forced butchers to make major buying trips to oxen markets, which took them far beyond the boundaries of the city.²⁰⁷⁶ Only in one case can the location of a purchase be precisely determined on the basis of the entry in the accounts. *Sechinger* received the loan in Basel paid out in the currency of Burgundy, so it can be assumed that he purchased his goods in that currency region: *contante in moretti di Borgongnia*.²⁰⁷⁷ After the Council lost general recognition, these transactions broke down completely. There is no mention of these butcher accounts in the Medici balance sheet of 1442.

For the citizens of German cities, deposit transactions with the Florentines were of little financial interest, as they only paid an interest rate of 5 per cent.²⁰⁷⁸ This return was also possible on the local capital market, where the risks were significantly lower.²⁰⁷⁹ Therefore, not one native merchant can be found among the deposit clients of the Italian banks in the North. Surprisingly, however, the Basel Council used the services of the Medici when it deposited the sum of f. 1,600 at interest with the banking house in 1440/41.²⁰⁸⁰

6.3 Safety on German Roads

6.3.1 Trade Routes

Florentine merchants frequently travelled back and forth between their hometown and the most important northern trading centres in Flanders. They transported an almost unimaginable quantity of goods and cash on these journeys. The traffic of people, goods, and news on these routes posed one of the biggest economic problems of the Middle Ages, for the roads had

2074 ASFi MAP 131 C.

2075 On the significance of the European trade in oxen in the Late Middle Ages, see Westermann (1979); Blanchard (1986).

2076 Koelner (1948), pp. 36–38.

2077 Koelner (1948), p. 69.

2078 For the transaction with the bishop of Barcelona, see below p. 423.

2079 Gilomen (2011).

2080 Harms (1909–1913), I, p. 157: *Item empfangen XVII guldin zinses von den wechszelern in Heinrich Halbysens hus als die etwas zites XVII guldin hinder inen hatten, die der räten worent, fecerunt XIX lb XI s.*

not got better since Roman times: they were even worse in most cases.²⁰⁸¹ From Flanders, an overland route, supplemented in places by inland navigation, led via Ghent or Brussels, then via Paris through the Rhone Valley (*via rodania, lo chamino di Parigi*) to Avignon. From there, one continued on foot to Marseilles or Arles, then by ship to Pisa, and overland again for the remaining kilometres to Florence.²⁰⁸² As an alternative to the routes through the Rhone Valley, the Florentines already used the roads of Flanders through the Rhine Valley to Basel in the thirteenth century (*lo chamino della Magna*),²⁰⁸³ then on to Geneva via the Swiss Plateau. From Geneva, they often went through the Rhone Valley to the South of France or over the Mount Cenis, Great St Bernard, or Simplon passes to northern Italy.²⁰⁸⁴

Jean-François Bergier's thesis that the Gotthard had been the *liaison privilégiée entre l'Italie et l'Occident*²⁰⁸⁵ does not hold for the Florentines, as this pass played only a minor role for them.²⁰⁸⁶ Information about the transport of Florentine merchandise in which the Gotthard

2081 Gömmel (1987), pp. 1039–1040. See Kellenbenz (1965).

2082 Pegolotti describes the route from London to Florence by ship: to the mouth of the Garonne, through this to Libourne on the Dordogne, overland via Montpellier to Aigues-Mortes in Provence, by ship to Porto Pisano, up the Arno by barge via Pisa to Signa, and then by wagon to Florence. See Friedmann (1912), p. 76; Pegolotti (1936), pp. 209–212 and 256–258. According to Perroni (1968), p. 134, this was the most important route by 1335. Inland navigation was also very important. See Eckolt (1980). On the history of transport routes from Italy to the North, Schulte (1900) should still be consulted, even though there are a number of more recent studies in the meantime that revisit and amend different aspects. – Davidsohn (1896–1925), IV/2, pp. 319–320. – Pegolotti reports that wares bought in *Borgogna dello imperio* had to be exported through the Rhine Valley, because otherwise they would fall into the hands of the French king. The Rhone route was only open for goods from *Borgogna nel reame* (France). See Pegolotti (1936), p. 232.

2083 In January 1313, Jacopo Perivoli from Castelfiorentino, an employee of the Frescobaldi in Bruges, took this route to Basel in his escape from English justice. In Basel, he met Mancino Benci, whom the shareholders from Vienne had sent to meet him. Nothing more is known about their stay in Basel, as these reports are based only on the expense claims of the two merchants. See Saporì (1955–1967b), p. 908. – Further evidence of the use of this route from Flanders via Basel to the South of France can be found in the bill for the transport of cloth that the Alberti carried out from Flanders to Avignon in 1348: *della mandata di panni cinquantadue che 'nostri di Fiandra mandarono loro per lo chamino della Magna e da Basola*. See Saporì (1952), p. 298; Ehrensperger (1972), p. 267.

2084 On the western Alpine passes, see Hassinger (1978–1981). On the Simplon route in the 14th century, see Daviso (1951); Fournier (1981).

2085 Bergier (1975), p. 29.

2086 In his investigation of customs registers that recorded transports over the Gotthard in the years 1493 to 1505, Glauser (1968), p. 243, does not mention a single Florentine; it was almost exclusively merchants from Upper Germany, Asti, Milan, and Como whom one met on the pass. As a result of his work, he came to the conclusion that although the Gotthard was an important Alpine pass in the Late Middle Ages, the eastern passes (particularly the Brenner Pass) were more important. What he formulated for the transport of all goods certainly applies to an even greater extent to the Florentines, and this also in the period up to 1474. – See Martini/Vismara (1956), p. 287; Ehrensperger (1972), p. 266; Frangioni (1983); Frangioni (1994). – The following statement by Kellenbenz (1985), p. 334, must be limited to certain Italian trading cities: “*La strada più importante in direzione della Renania era quella che attraversava il Gottardo e passava a Basilea, continuando alla sinistra del Reno via Strasburgo fino a Magonza e scendendo la valle del Reno, a Colonia.*”

is mentioned are quite rare.²⁰⁸⁷ It was not only the arduousness of the crossing that played an important role in this, but also the dominant position of Milan, which did not allow access to its opponents during the many years of conflict with Florence and Venice.²⁰⁸⁸ Around 1350, the Alberti transported cloth together with Venetians in convoys over the pass many times.²⁰⁸⁹ The next piece of evidence regarding the transport of Florentine goods over the Gotthard comes from 1369, when Lando d' Antonio degli Albizzi in Mechelen commissioned a *conduttore* to transport cloth from Flanders via Basel and Milan to Florence.²⁰⁹⁰ It is more frequently recorded that travellers who were not carrying goods crossed the Gotthard. For example, one of them was the famous chronicler Benedetto Dei when he, accompanied by Accerito Portinari, returned from the North to his place of employment in the Medici subsidiary in Milan.²⁰⁹¹ Nevertheless, the mid-Alpine passes were not particularly popular even with individual merchants. One learns from the detailed reports of Buonaccorso Pitti of his different trips to France and Germany that he never used a mid-Alpine pass. He usually circumvented the Gotthard to the west, crossed the Simplon, the Great St Bernard, or took the route through Provence and the Rhone Valley.²⁰⁹²

From the second half of the fourteenth century on, more and more goods for Cologne, Frankfurt, and Upper Germany were transported across the Brenner Pass and the neighbouring eastern Alpine crossings.²⁰⁹³ These passes were especially important for the Florentines in Lübeck and Nuremberg, who had their factors transport goods and cash between Italy and Germany: *la via di Verona*. The merchants did not always choose the most direct route, but wanted to visit the important trading centres on the way. From a letter that Gherardo Bueri wrote to Giovanni de' Medici on 25 April 1446, we learn that he planned his route from Florence to Lübeck via Geneva and then probably Basel.²⁰⁹⁴ He had most likely chosen this route before, as documentation of his stay in Basel shows. It is very likely that he decided on this route in order to take care of business in Geneva on the way. Geneva was an important waypoint for merchants who wanted to travel from there via Schaffhausen or Constance to the markets of Upper Germany. However, definitive evidence that a Florentine travelling to Germany chose this route cannot be found.

When the Strait of Gibraltar was open to Italians, many traders switched from land to sea. By 1277, the Genoese were sending galleys around the Iberian Peninsula to Flanders and England.

2087 Schulte (1900), p. 458.

2088 See Mainoni (1984).

2089 See Goldthwaite et al. (1995), pp. LII, 41, 86, 123, 125, 126, 135, 152, 156, 213, 214, and 222.

2090 ASFi, Mercanzia 1160, 1371 novembre 13.

2091 Schulte (1900), p. 455.

2092 Pitti (1905), pp. 57, 100, 106, 117, and 209–228.

2093 Kellenbenz (1977b), pp. 199–206; Rösch (1982), pp. 43–44; Kellenbenz (1985), p. 335. – Map in Braunstein (1986), p. 36.

2094 ASFi, MAP 8, no. 162.

These routes were plied regularly from 1298 on, and Sluis, the seaport of Bruges, became the harbour for journeys to the west.²⁰⁹⁵ However, it was only from 1325 on that this became a truly important transport route and Bruges an important centre of German-Florentine relations. The mercantile ships known by the Tuscans as *navigli di alemanni* came by the hundreds from Bremen, Hamburg, and the Scandinavian countries.²⁰⁹⁶ The sea route gained in importance for the Florentines when they conquered Pisa in 1406 and bought Livorno from Genoa in 1421, for they thus came into possession of harbours from which they carried out regular galley voyages to Bruges.²⁰⁹⁷

There were, therefore, a large number of possibilities to choose from for the journey between Bruges and Italy. Based on the Alberti account books, Marco Spallanzani was able to work out that Jacopo and Bartolomeo degli Alberti (1348–50) preferred the route through the Rhone Valley to the Gotthard Pass in a ratio of 4.5 to 1.²⁰⁹⁸ The *compagnia* of Bartolomeo (1352–58) preferred the *chamino di Parigi* to an even greater extent and chose only once to take the route through Germany. During the seven accounting years that were analysed, 4,100 textile items were transported between Paris and Avignon; on the alternative through Germany there were only 93.²⁰⁹⁹ The preference of the Alberti for the overland journey via Paris is quite typical for Florentines, as many economic historians show: Florentine merchants seldom crossed the Alpine passes on the way to Flanders; they took the *via rodania* much more frequently.²¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, it was atypical that the Alberti only once – during the period of time analysed – chose the direct maritime route from the North Sea to the Mediterranean, when they had three bales of cloth transported by Venetian ships from Flanders to Italy.²¹⁰¹ That is to say, ships were often preferred to wagons from the second half of the fourteenth century on. Giovanni da Uzzano confirms shortly before 1440 in his *Pratica di Mercatura* that merchants transported more goods by sea than overland: *ma è più mandano per mare, che per terra*.²¹⁰² Spallanzani calculated that although the average costs for transport over the Gotthard were a third lower than those

2095 Roover (1948a), p. 50. – The first known passage of a galley sailing from Genoa to Flanders has been documented in 1277; the Venetians came from 1314 onwards. See Houtte (1985), p. 153; Melis (1990a), p. 362. Basque sailors had already transported wine from France on this route in 1210. See Houtte (1994), p. 259.

2096 Melis (1984), pp. 135 and 148–149.

2097 Doren (1901–1908), p. 109; Kuske (1909), p. 411; Roover (1963), p. 2; Watson (1963).

2098 Goldthwaite et al. (1995), p. XLIX. – Courier service between Florence and Champagne/Flanders, which had existed since the 13th century, usually took this route. See Simon (1974), p. 23.

2099 Goldthwaite et al. (1995), p. LXXIV.

2100 Melis (1974b), p. 304; Bergier (1979b); Soldi Rondinini (1978); Hassinger (1979); Kellenbenz (1985).

2101 The Alberti were among the first Florentines to take the maritime route. In Holmes's opinion, they were also "certainly unusual", because they owned their own ships for trade with northern Europe. They are said to have organized their own transportation network before the end of the 14th century. See Holmes (1960–1961), p. 196.

2102 Da Uzzano (1766), IV, p. 128. This growth of transport by ship by the Florentines stands in contrast to the development of other big trading nations. See Lexikon des Mittelalters (1980–1999), II, col. 747.

for the route via Avignon,²¹⁰³ the time it took was in inverse proportion: Goods transported through Germany to Florence took 101 to 167 days, whereas for the route via Avignon it took 50 days less.²¹⁰⁴ On the maritime route through the Strait of Gibraltar, textiles were underway for sixty-seven days, whereby this time could be halved when the ships docked in Porto Pisano and no longer had to take the detour via the Venice harbour.

6.3.2 Dangers

The sea route was not only much faster than the land route, but it was also much safer, even if one considered the risk of a ship sinking. In the North, for long periods of time, war raged (Hundred Years' War, Burgundian Wars); the Gotthard route was intermittently blocked by conflicts between Austrians and the Swiss Confederacy; and, in the South, coalitions changed again and again between the great powers Venice, Milan, and Florence.

Many perils lurked on the German roads; there were common criminals, robber barons, and noblemen who, for whatever reason, harassed the merchants with reprisals.²¹⁰⁵ When Ludovico Baglioni was on the road in southern Germany in 1419, he lost a very valuable unicorn in Schaffhausen.²¹⁰⁶ Eight years later, Gherardo Bueri was robbed while he was on his way to collect papal dues in the bishopric of Schwerin.²¹⁰⁷ Several transient Venetians were robbed near Nuremberg.²¹⁰⁸ On an Alberti transport from Flanders over the Gotthard (*il chamino*

2103 Goldthwaite et al. (1995), p. tav. 3.1, 3.4, and 3.5. See Kellenbenz (1977b), p. 206.

2104 Goldthwaite et al. (1995), p. LXXXV.

2105 Schulte (1900), pp. 185, 203, 497, etc.; Doren (1901–1908), p. 109. On the precariousness of roads in Germany, see Schulte (1900), pp. 453 and 494–497; Afflerbach (1993), pp. 36–38. On 1 April 1361, Emperor Charles IV had established an imperial customs duty in Basel and had pawned it to the city. It was a half-guilder customs duty per load, which soon became a whole guilder. This made the transients feel exploited, and, in 1370 and 1391, the Milanese tried – through diplomatic demarches – to have this duty lowered. Schulte (1900), p. 417; Ehrensperger (1972), p. 267. – On 13 March 1361, Rudolf IV, duke of Austria, gave the Italian merchants, including those from *Florentia*, a letter of safe conduct for the road from Ottmarsheim via Basel, Rheinfelden, the Bözberg Pass, and Brugg to Lucerne. Reprinted in Schulte (1900), pp. 24–25. – On 22 December 1368, Count Siegmund of Thierstein gave the *mercatores* from Florence (as well as those from Milan, Como, and Venice) a letter of safe conduct. Reprinted in Schulte (1900), pp. 25–26 and 420. – In 1415, a safe conduct for Milan, Como, Lucca, Venice, Tuscany, and Lombardy from Duke Charles II of Lorraine and various other gentlemen for the route from the Mosel to Strasbourg. Ehrensperger (1972), p. 268. – Friedmann (1912), p. 105: “Immerhin ist es eigentümlich, dass auch noch damals die Verkehrsbeziehungen zwischen Florenz und Deutschland keine sehr regen waren und die Urkunden, welche auf diesen Verkehr Bezug nehmen, an Zahl sehr spärlich sind.” (‘All the same, it is odd that even then the traffic between Florence and Germany was not very busy and the documents that refer to this traffic are few in number.’)

2106 RG Online, RG IV 01123, <http://rg-online.dhi-roma.it/RG/4/1123>, 02.07.2021. Schuchard (2000b), p. 77. – In the Middle Ages, narwal tusks were sold as unicorn horns.

2107 Schuchard (2000b), p. 80.

2108 Braunstein (1967), p. 378.

della Magna), a convoy of wagons belonging to a count – who is variously named in Italian sources as *conte Giovanni di Brainborgo*, *Bramborgo*, *Braynborgoi*, and also *Vraimborgho* – was detained on the road between Basel and Lucerne. The carter responsible for the transport, Stefano da Vinciona, immediately sent a messenger to his clients with the bad news. Among the clients were, in addition to Venetians, also the Alberti and Bardi from Florence: *per farci sapere dell'arestamento*. Apparently, most of the goods belonged to Venetian merchants, because the Florentines sent the Alberti factor Ticcio di Bonaccorso Bonaccorsi to Venice first, in order to agree on a joint approach with the principal stakeholders for the recovery of the confiscated goods.²¹⁰⁹ The Venetian Jacopo Merhadelli made his way to Lucerne, but had no success there. Therefore, the Alberti decided to take things into their own hands (*per riavere quattro nostri torselli di panni*). As they did not have a branch office in Germany from which they could have sent a representative versed in the language of the Swiss Confederacy, Bonaccorsi was entrusted with the matter, even though he had only worked in southern Italy previously. From Milan, he set across the Alps for Lucerne in August and actually managed to recover the Alberti wares.²¹¹⁰

Around 1430, the Franconian knight Albrecht von Egloffstein and his three sons, whose castle was situated north of Nuremberg, held up a goods train. The victims, merchants from Lübeck, went all the way up to the king and the superior court of justice in order to get their goods back. After the four Franconian knights failed to comply with a summons three times, they were outlawed by King Sigismund on 25 January 1431. Nevertheless, the merchants' goods still had not been handed over on 1 October 1434. Perhaps they never were. In January 1441, Konrad and Leonhard von Gumpfenberg raided a goods transport of Hanseatic merchants at Castle Scherneck. After an intervention by Elector Palatine Louis IV, the merchants confirmed the prompt return of their goods on 3 July 1441.²¹¹¹ In both cases Gherardo Bueri was among the aggrieved merchants. Francesco Rucellai did not fare any better. He was commissioned by the Curia to transport moneys of the collector Marinus de Fregeno from Lübeck to the South.

2109 Two Venetians were deployed, one as *camerlengo* (*messer Niccolò Leoni*) and the other as *ricompratore* (*messer Bartolomeo Merhadelli*). – There was most certainly not a robber baron behind this incident, but rather the ventures of Emperor Charles IV, directed against Venice, and undertaken in the economic interests of Nuremberg. The conflict that broke out between the Habsburgs and the Swiss Confederacy at this time may also have played a role, as both powers tried to direct the merchants through the territory that each controlled. On the imperial side, the knight Burkard Münch of Basel particularly distinguished himself; see Stromer (1978b), p. 68. Moreover, a not yet identified Count Hans von Froburg was involved in the incident described here. These noblemen were owners of the lower Hauenstein Pass, which was the most important crossing of the Jura mountains since the opening of the Gotthard Pass; see Schulte (1900), p. 183. The Venetians were robbed many times in the upper Rhine region in those years. As early as 1348, a Venetian ambassador was in Basel to reclaim requisitioned goods and to hold talks about traffic privileges. Three years later, Venetians on their way to Flanders lost 34 bales of goods. See Mone (1854), pp. 20–21; Cessi (1952), pp. 143–148; Ehrensperger (1972), p. 267.

2110 On the background of this confiscation, see Cessi (1914), pp. 73–92.

2111 UBStL, VIII, no. 11, p. 10; no. 22, pp. 25–26. – See Fouquet (1998), p. 217.

The Duke William of Braunschweig and his son Frederick had the caravan raided between Norheim and Göttingen in the summer of 1462. They claimed that they thought they were dealing with goods from the town of Lüneburg, against which they were executing reprisals because of a feud. Everyone involved in the act was excommunicated by Rome. Whether these measures had any effect is at the least doubtful, as no evidence documenting a restitution of the money can be found.²¹¹²

General statements about safety on German trade routes are hard to make. On the one hand, reports mainly recorded unpleasant incidents. On the other hand, in addition to the facts, subjective feelings are also responsible for whether one feels safe or not. In 1436, the Medici sent their employee Bernardo Portinari to Bruges to set up a branch office there. The instructions (*ricordi*) given to him contain comprehensive information on how he should travel through Germany. He was to travel via Basel, where, because of the Council taking place there, it was easier to find travelling companions and travel safely. Nonetheless, he should not let it be known that he was a merchant; he should only explain that he was going to the Council.²¹¹³ What is striking is the advice that Portinari should in no case be recognized as a Florentine in Germany for fear of reprisals. This could only refer to the measures taken by King Sigismund in 1418 due to the complaints by Friedrich Deys against Matteo Borromei. The two Florentines were instructed to pose as Romans and servants of the cardinal of *S. Angelo* (Giuliano Cesarini).²¹¹⁴ Merchants thus took advantage of the fact that, during the Council of Basel, traffic on the roads to and from the synod greatly increased. Therefore, it was easier to form larger groups of travellers. Added to this was the protection accorded to Council participants who travelled with an imperial letter of safe conduct. But even a clerical vestment and the protection of the pope did not always keep robbers away, as the many raids on papal collectors in Germany document.²¹¹⁵ Portinari was instructed to pay particular attention to his safety during his journey. If he had suspicions of danger lurking anywhere, he should wait for company: better to wait and travel safely than fast and dangerously.²¹¹⁶

2112 Krantz (1546), p. 348; Krantz (1574), p. 846; Voigt (1968), p. 161.

2113 ASFi, MAP 68, no. 588: *Per ogni chaso ci pare pure sia meglio d'andare a Basilea che per l'altre via. Molte più compagnie e più sichuro camino troverai, senza altre dimostrazione se non che vai al Choncilio, e quando sarai a Basilea ti sarà trovato buona compagnia per Brugia, e dando tu bocie di volere andare a Ginevra, tirerai a tuo chamino.*

2114 ASFi, MAP 68, no. 588: *Una cosa abi a richordo, che per tutta la Magnia tu non ti faccia da Firenze, per cierte rapresagle vi sono. Potrai dire essere del paese di Roma e servidore del chardinale di Sancto Agnolo, e così avisa il famiglo.* On reprisals because of Friedrich Deys, see p. 61.

2115 Denzel (1995b), p. 327. – See Renouard (1941), pp. 139–146, 208, 213, and 310–313; Roover (1948a), p. 238; Despy (1952), pp. 102–108; Militzer (1993), p. 35.

2116 ASFi, MAP 68, no. 588: *Prima t'ingegnerai a ogni modo d'andare a salvamento chom più presteza potrai non rimettendo però a pericolo dove chonosciessi dubio, fosse per lo chammino o per altro che bisognando soprastare per attendere chompagnia o chose che schifassi pericholo e sospetto, più tosto ti confortiamo a soprastare alchuni*

6.3.3 Channels of Communication

One of the fundamentals of trade with bills of exchange was a postal system that ensured the quick and reliable transport of documents. Branch offices with Italian parent companies provided information on the course of business, gave instructions and explanations regarding particular transactions, as well as information on the development of the competitive situation. Headquarters and correspondents were also informed of political events. Twelve such letters have been preserved from the employees of the Medici bank in Basel alone.²¹¹⁷ These dispatches – between Bruges, Geneva, Venice, Rome, and all the other important financial centres – could be handled without difficulty most of the time. There were also stable courier systems in the fifteenth century that were available to the Florentine merchants in Germany.²¹¹⁸ Correspondence from Italy was sent overland to Bruges; from there, couriers regularly rode to Cologne and Lübeck. Gherardo Bueri advised the Medici to send letters to Lübeck by this route and not via Nuremberg; evidently, it seemed to him less susceptible to losses. In the middle of the fifteenth century, it took messengers twelve days to ride from Flanders to the Hanseatic city.²¹¹⁹ It is surprising that Bueri never reported in his letters that he had made use of this messenger service in the opposite direction, although he did write that he often had difficulty in sending his correspondence to the west and the south. Because of this difficulty, he had to give his documents to his own servants, who then travelled to Bruges, Venice or Basel, or to other persons who were willing to do him this favour. A letter he wrote on 30 January 1447 but was only able to send on 15 March shows how onerous this was at times: *Tenuta a dì 15 di marzo per non essere achaduto per chi mandarla.*²¹²⁰ It did not look any different a generation later, when the Spinelli were in lively contact with Cologne and Nuremberg. The correspondence list that Lionardo Spinelli made in 1464/65 in Venice shows that he hired messengers to deliver papal documents to Cologne who only carried out the assignment for him alone.²¹²¹ It is easy to understand that he did not want to give just any traveller such important documents. There was a courier service between Venice and the Upper German cities that was capable of taking letters to Nuremberg within five days.²¹²² Spinelli, however, like Bueri, did not use

dì andando sichuro che l'affrettarti andando con pericholo. On fast and safe journeys, see Renouard (1941), pp. 549–550; Perroni (1968), p. 134.

2117 ASFI, MAP II, nos. 543, 609, 611, and 618; 13, nos. 77 and 114; 16, no. 21; 20, nos. 50, 55, and 76; 88, no. 119; 96, no. 15.

2118 Drossbach (2001).

2119 Neumann (1980–1981), p. 13.

2120 Weissen (2003), p. 76. See Sieveking (1906), p. 25.

2121 For example, YUSA 93, 1779, c. 53 left: *Richordo questo dì 30 di dicembre io diè a Pangrazio, chorriere, quando lo mandai a Colongna, per parte di suo salario, ducati 15, e patti ò cho' llui ne richordo in questo, c. 99.*

2122 Roeck (2000), p. 48.

these official messengers but, rather, sought out German merchants who were willing to add his correspondence to theirs.²¹²³

The difficulties in sending bills of exchange by messengers led to the fact that, as a rule, no fixed payment deadlines were set for German bills of exchange after they were issued. Instead, they were honoured a certain number of days after they had been presented (*vista*) to the payer. Compared to the normal situation, during the Council in Basel it was much easier to find travelers who could be given letters, while bankers commissioned their own couriers for very important letters.²¹²⁴ In October 1438, for example, an employee of Filippo Borromei's bank sent letters from Geneva to the manager in Antwerp via Basel and included them in the correspondence of the Medici to Basel: *Ultimam meam tibi scripsi per Basileam sub litteris illorum de Medicis*.²¹²⁵ The Council of Basel also used the Medici bank as a postal courier many times. For example, in 1436, when various letters had to be taken to Constantinople.²¹²⁶ A small account book of the Medici in Basel names not fewer than seven messengers who worked for them several times between 13 December 1433 and 27 June of the following year.²¹²⁷

6.4 Florentines and Germans

6.4.1 The Lagging behind of the Germans

It is difficult to give a definitive explanation for the scant interest of the great Florentine trading companies in Germany, as no direct sources make any statements about it. The most important factor cited in the literature on economic history is the different level of development between the two economic areas. This difference can be seen in the volume of trade and the simple business methods, as Raymond de Roover stresses again and again: “The business methods of

2123 For example, YUSA 93, no. 1779, c. 100 right: *A Norinbergho, per mano di Lionardo Risfolgore* [Lienhard Hirschvogel]. *Una a Gian Muler e compagni* [Hans Müllner].

2124 ASFi, MAP 131 C, c. 10.

2125 ABIB, Famiglia, Filippo di Vitaliano. – A reason why this letter was written in Latin is not apparent. – On the transport routes to Geneva, see also Breittmayer (1904); Hugentobler (1949).

2126 ASFi, MAP 131 C, c. 120. – On 24 December 1436, the Medici in Venice had the Council correspondence taken by sea to Constantinople: *A' nostri di Basilea per loro, lire quattro di grossi, posto debbino avere al quaderno di chassa a c. 38, sono per tanti facciamo di spese in mandare una barcha a Duratzo chon loro lettere andavano in Ghostantinopoli agli 'nbasciadori del Choncilio; posto a libro grande, a c. 152, f. 4. ASFi, MAP 134, no. 1, c. 120v. Published in Weissen (2021), pp. 550–552.*

2127 ASFi MAP 131 C: *Gianino, coriere del'nbasciadori, per lettere portò a Vinegia; Porina, coriere, per lettere ci recò da Vinegia; Mateo, coriere; Gioschin; uno coriere degl'nbasciadori di Vinegia; Tritachio, coriere; Ricio, coriere; Ianni da Norinbergo, coriere.*

the German merchants were much more primitive than those of the Italians.”²¹²⁸ “However, business methods in Northern Germany were backward in comparison with those of the Italian merchant-bankers; this was perhaps the main reason why the latter failed to develop Lübeck into a banking center.”²¹²⁹ “Dans l’Allemagne du Nord, les méthodes commerciales rétrogrades de la Hanse tuetonique furent lentes à changer.”²¹³⁰ Gerhard Fouquet also speaks of a ‘lagging behind in the Hanseatic Baltic region’ which he sees in the lack of ‘expansion of cashless monetary transactions and credit creation’.²¹³¹ This thesis can be endorsed if one looks at market activities within German economic regions. Complex banking transactions based on exchange rate fluctuations can definitely not be found among German merchants of the Late Middle Ages either.

This so-called lagging behind, however, must be seen in a differentiated manner when one considers the German merchants whose fields of business went beyond their own business spheres. Many of them knew exactly how a bill of exchange functioned. The *ricordanze* of Lionardo Spinelli have unequivocally shown that German merchants knew how to manage credit and credit limits with this financial instrument. Even without Italian involvement, they were able to provide the funds needed in Bruges or Venice not only by transporting cash, exporting precious metals, or selling goods, but also by relying on an organized payment system. Directives to Bruges, Venice, and – in all probability – Milan were possible; from these cities onwards, however, the transactions were controlled solely by the Italians.²¹³² The same thing was true in the other direction: payments from the South to the North had to be processed via intermediate stations in such commercial towns on the periphery of the German economic area.²¹³³ Thus, two closed circles of payment systems came into being: the German-northern one and the Italian one. The two were linked in a few places in order to enable the transfer from one sphere to the other. Direct transactions of the Florentine Curia-based banks with partners in German cities only partially breached these boundaries, for without the banking centres they were not possible. The accusation that they had no idea of double-entry bookkeeping is also irrelevant, as the qualitative state of bookkeeping has no influence whatsoever on the business of transferring money.²¹³⁴ This could also have been managed – albeit laboriously – with

2128 Roover (1948a), p. 60.

2129 Roover (1963), p. 196.

2130 Roover (1970b), p. 28.

2131 Fouquet (1998), p. 192: “Rückstand des hansischen Ostseeraums ... Ausweitung des bargeldlosen Geldverkehrs und der Kreditschöpfung.”

2132 Beuttel (1999), p. 266, note 556: On 29 April 1322, the bishop of Kurland pays part of the Servitium Commune in Avignon through *Bonaiuti Rogerii de societate Perutorum de Florentia*; on 11 September 1324, the bishop of Kurland pays servitia via Bardi (*Lorinus de Bardis de societate Bardorum*).

2133 Stromer (1971), pp. 51–52.

2134 On the commercial skills of the Germans, see Braunstein (2016), pp. 407–490.

a pure paper economy. The complex transactions with bills of exchange, with which currency fluctuations were speculated on, are, on the other hand, dependent on a more sophisticated accountancy. The decisive advantage of the Florentines in German transactions with the Curia was the organization of their clearing system between the banking centres supported by commodity trading and the comparatively finance dominated business in Rome. The know-how that they had accumulated in their banking transactions with the Apostolical Chamber and the clerics of the Curia was also important. For these reasons, the Florentines were superior not only to the German merchants, but also to all other trading nations.

The basis of every commercial cooperation is trust between the parties involved. The personal encounters between the Florentines and the Germans were of central importance in Venice. Giovanni de' Medici met up with Wilhelm Rummel there in order to organize payments of the Republic of Florence to the Roman-German King Rupert of the Palatinate. From then on, the two families worked together on into the 1430s. When Giovanni d'Amerigo Benci was looking for premises for the Medici bank and its employees in Basel, he found them with Heinrich Halbisen, who was well known in Venice.²¹³⁵ Tommaso Spinelli took lodgings with the Venice merchant Wernli von Kilchen. He explained that the reason he did business with the Basel merchant in 1437 even though it was very risky was that he knew him personally and trusted him. He went on to say that von Kilchen was discreet and he also did not begrudge business partners honour and profit: *nondimancho perché io chonoscho Varnieri discreto e ama l'onore mio e l'utile, sono chontento di questa differenza dello avere in prima ducati 100 per ducati 105 di camera.*²¹³⁶ Lionardo Spinelli went to Venice to meet Friedrich Humpis on 6 February 1465 to negotiate the modalities of a credit transaction by means of bills of exchange between Venice and Bruges. Two days later, he met Hans Tucher, Anton Paumgartner's factor in the city, and discussed the implementation of the servitia payment of the archbishop of Cologne.²¹³⁷

6.4.2 Obstacles

Trading with bills of exchange involved a high degree of literacy, as it only functioned through extensive correspondence between the banks involved. Written language competence was, therefore, much more important than it was in local commodity trade or credit transactions. Consequently, problems of understanding had to be seen as serious malfunctions. Tommaso Spinelli was evidently quite annoyed when Peter von Watt and Wernli von Kilchen wrote to him

2135 ASFi, MAP 104, no. 60, cc. 598–602. Published in [Weissen \(2021\)](#), pp. 497–508.

2136 YUSA 89, 1694a. Published in [Weissen \(2021\)](#), pp. 489–492.

2137 YUSA 93, 1779, cc. 57 left and right.

in German. As he did not understand a word of the language, he had to bring in a German to translate the letters. He feared there would be misunderstandings and losses because of this.²¹³⁸ His nephew Lionardo seems to have been somewhat more flexible, for he also accepted bills of exchange written in German in Rome. On 5 January 1467, Hans and Erhart Vöhlin issued a bill of exchange in Venice for more than 17 cameral ducats to the credit of frater Petrus de Caprarino, who is described as the preceptor of the priory of the Augustinian monastery in Memmingen. The preceptor received the sum on 10 February. The brothers issued a second bill of exchange on 25 January 1468 in Memmingen. In return, the Spinelli were to pay out 30 cameral ducats in Rome to the superior of the Augustinian monastery in Memmingen, Filipp Vogel.²¹³⁹ The bill of exchange was, in fact, honoured on 20 April of that year, which the clergyman named above acknowledged.

The chances that a Florentine in Rome would be able to read German correspondence were very slim. Other than Ugolotto Agli,²¹⁴⁰ there is no evidence that any Florentine bankers or silk merchants living in Germany learned the local language. Gherardo Bueri will, of course, have learned more than a few scraps of the language. The Grand Master wrote to him in German, even though he certainly could have done so in Latin. Bueri kept his books in Italian, and not a single piece of writing from him in German is extant. Francesco Rucellai on the Trave, Bartolomeo Biliotti on the Rhine, and Benvenuto Aldobrandi on the Pegnitz probably acquired a basic knowledge of German for everyday use; however, they never made it their business language. Three short letters in German to the city of Thun from Lamberteschi have been preserved. The handwriting, however, is that of a German: thus, he brought in a person from Basel to write them.²¹⁴¹ There is only one single entry in the German language in a Florentine merchant's book. It is on the last page of the *manuale di mercatura di Saminiato de' Ricci*.²¹⁴² This connection to Germany is based on the specific situation of the writer, for Antonio di ser Francesco Salutati da Pescia had been in the service of Giovanni de' Medici since 1416 and had probably spent some time at the Lake of Constance.²¹⁴³

2138 YUSA 89, 1694a: *Troppa soma fu avere tratto, e poi e' ci scrive in tedesco [...] Credo che a Varnieri no' farò altra risposta a una sua, avuta pure in tedesco, dove mi parlla di detti ducati 3 mila e sì del tempo. [...] a nullo modo intendo d'avermi a inbochare per le mani d'altri d'avermi a fare leggere le lettere, ché ssai quanti a quelli erori a mio danno si potrebe pigliare.* Published in Weissen (2021), pp. 489–492.

2139 YUSA 98, 1850: *Bezalt vir disen ersten wechselfrieff bruoder Filipp Vuogel, superior sant Augustin orden im chloster ze Meingen biss uff 30 fl. di kamera als er fil er von [...] biss uff die sum alls drissig fl. di kamera und waz ir im geben daw, niempt quittantz von im und sendet sy messer Nicodemo Spinely gen Venedig. Wen er mir die gibt, so will ich in ze Venedig bezallen, wie er mit uns ainss ist worden. Und dez ze verkind hab ich, Hans Fechlin, daz geschriben mit miner hand geschrift vir mich und min bruoder Erhart und unser geselschaft.*

2140 Sacchetti (1970), pp. 199–200.

2141 Burgerarchiv Thun, 665, nos. 109, 111, and 113.

2142 See below p. 409.

2143 Ricci (1963). See Guidi Bruscoli (1960–).

Ach liber her got hilf und berat.

*Meyn wylligen trewn dinst zuvor. Liber her, ewre gnaden las ich zu wyssen, als mir meyn bruder
Iohannes myr alle meyne gutte und geld genommen hat, und das hat er geton [...?] eyn rechte
scholkeheit als eyn peine und frouter harn [...?].²¹⁴⁴*

The fact that few Florentines were interested in learning German is documented in a manuscript from 1467 with the title: *Questo libro lo quale si chiama Introito e porta di choloro che voglono inparare tedescho e partito in quattro parti secondo la quattro alimenti.*²¹⁴⁵ On c. 82v of this manuscript, it says: *questo libro è di Nicholo Rucelai e chonpangni in Firenze.* A connection to Francesco Rucellai in Lübeck seems probable, cannot, however, be proven.²¹⁴⁶ It was easy to find somebody in Rome who knew the German language and was able to translate a bill of exchange into Italian. There were always enough clerics from Germany at the papal court who could help the bankers. In other places, interpreters were used. Presumably, there was a problem of understanding at the beginning of the emergence of the brokerage profession. Germans in Bruges sought out middlemen who understood the Italians and their business when they wanted to transfer sums of money to western or southern Europe. They found their partners among the landlords and landladies of the inns where they stayed. This was completely normal for the Italians, because they worked in many places in Europe with innkeepers whom they visited regularly on their travels. The word *oste* was used as a synonym for business partner/correspondent in the fourteenth century.²¹⁴⁷ The van der Beurse innkeepers in Bruges were particularly important. As brokers between the Hanse and the Italians, they played such a central role that their house became one of the most important meeting places for merchants of both nations.²¹⁴⁸ The German word “Börse” derives from their name. In Venice, too, official brokers were engaged.²¹⁴⁹

The Medici in Venice made transactions with Germany easier for themselves when, around 1427, they employed a German: *Gianni di Lubiche, nostro garzonetto.*²¹⁵⁰ This servant may have arrived in the city through the good offices of Gherardo Bueri. Ghuglemo, tedescho, worked

2144 Ricci (1963), pp. 89, 97, 111–115, 122, 133–134 and 148. – BNCF, Fondo Panciatichi 71, c. 33v.: ‘Oh dear Lord God, help and advise. My willing faithful service beforehand. Dear Lord, I let you know your grace, as my brother Johannes has taken all my goods and money from me, and he has done this [?] as a real knavery, as a torment and severe hardship [?].’

2145 BNCF, Magliabechiano IV, no. 66. For more detail, see Rossebastiano Bart (1984).

2146 On the foreign language skills of Florentine merchants: Weissen (2000); Guidi Bruscoli (2015); Soldani (2017).

2147 See Goldthwaite et al. (1995).

2148 Houtte (1978–1981), V, pp. 237–250.

2149 Simonsfeld (1887).

2150 ASFi, Catasto 49, c. 1188v.

in the Rome branch.²¹⁵¹ Numerous German employees can be found in the accountancy of the Spinelli: *Averardo della Magna, nostro famiglia* (1460); *Burcardo* (1463); *Sifredi* (1465); *Jachopo di Nicholayo della Magna, mio famiglia* (1466); *Arigho della Magna, nostro famiglia* (1466); and *Gherardo della Magna, nostro famiglia* (1466). Tilimano, whom Spinelli described as mio servidor, may also have been a German. Tedeschi are to be found in large numbers among the assistants employed by the Florentine Gherardo Bueri in his bank in Lübeck, while only cooks and ancillary staff have German names on the lists of the temporary banks at the Council of Basel.²¹⁵²

There is a great deal of evidence of Upper Germans and Hanseatic merchants who used the Italian language in their contacts with Venice. They mostly learned it during apprenticeships in La Serenissima. In 1449, Carlo de' Ricci wrote a letter to Abel Kalthoff in Cologne in Italian and evidently expected him to understand it as a matter of course.²¹⁵³ If you wanted to be accepted as a long-distance trader in Germany in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, you had to have spent time in Italy. The first document that tells us that young Germans went to Italy to be trained dates back to 1308. In addition to learning arithmetic with the abacus, they also went to schools *ad audiendum gramaticam*.²¹⁵⁴ In 1342, it was recorded regarding a certain Georg of Regensburg: *Qui est Veneciis causa adiscendi linguam*.²¹⁵⁵ Jakob Fugger also spent several years in Venice and later liked to sign his letters with Jacopo.²¹⁵⁶ There were at times whole groups of *adolescentes Theotonicos* staying at the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, *missos per parentes eorum ad hanc urbem nostram, ut discant linguam nostram et abachum*.²¹⁵⁷ Thus, if Tommaso Spinelli was annoyed that the two Germans wrote to him in their mother tongue, it is not surprising. He was probably right to expect two such experienced merchants – who were themselves in close business relations with Venice and who in all probability had also been there for a long time – to write to him in Italian.

A few German merchants sent their sons to Florence to be apprenticed. The first German merchant apprentice in a bank on the Arno is documented in July 1434. It was a young man from Lübeck whom Gherardo Bueri sent to Cosimo de' Medici in order to learn Italian. It was

2151 ASFi, Catasto 49, cc. 1162 ff.

2152 The image of Germans in the Italian literature was analysed by Amelung (1964) and Voigt (1973). They reported that Germans were above all reproached for their barbarism. Under this blanket term, they were blamed for stupidity, drunkenness, gluttony, cruelty, filthiness, debauchery, rapacity, greed, etc. The following practice sentence from a 15th century textbook for Venetian business parlance, is an expression of this assessment: "Go ahead and say the Germans are always drunk." Quotation from Esch (1994b), p. 120. The Italians considered craftsmanship and unpretentiousness as their positive qualities. Nevertheless, German servants evidently played an important role in aristocratic Florentine families during the Renaissance.

2153 ASFi, MAP 82, no. 179. Published in [Weissen \(2021\)](#), pp. 508–511.

2154 Simonsfeld (1887), I, p. 8.

2155 Simonsfeld (1887), I, p. 484.

2156 Pölnitz (1942).

2157 Simonsfeld (1887), I, p. 289.

Bueri's intention to deploy him in the trade between northern Germany and Venice. However, this undertaking failed, as Cosimo did not find the apprentice suitable. Bueri, therefore, fetched him back home again.²¹⁵⁸ Lienhard II Hirschvogel describes in his chronicle the training of his younger brother Franz: 'In the year of our Lord 1460, on the 16th of December, his father sent him out to Florence, there to learn to speak Italian. Then, in the year 1465, on the 18th of April, he then set out and came back home.' He was eleven years old when he left. To date, it has not been possible to ascertain in which Florentine bank young Hirschvogel did his apprenticeship. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that he can be found four years later in business relations with Florentines who had settled in Nuremberg.²¹⁵⁹ Around 1470, Wilhelm V Rummel lived for several years in the palace of Guasparre Spinelli as a young man.²¹⁶⁰ Finally, Wilhelm Rem, the son of an Augsburg merchant, went to Florence for an apprenticeship in 1478.²¹⁶¹

However, Tommaso Spinelli, at any rate, liked it best when Germans who did not know Italian wrote to him in Latin: *E si vogliamo cha da hora innanzi, de' danari che la lettera del cambio sieno in latino.*²¹⁶² This request was usually easy for the Germans to fulfil: Most long-distance Hanseatic traders used Latin well into the middle of the fourteenth century, not only for notarial acts,²¹⁶³ but also in their correspondence and bookkeeping. Moreover, many merchants among the Upper Germans were fluent in Latin. Franz Pirckheimer the Elder (1388–1449) was a silk and brocade merchant who had a large collection of medical, scientific, alchemical, and theological books. This direct forefather of the famous humanists Willibald and Caritas Pirckheimer single-handedly copied Latin works. His library was so important to him that he named it first in his will.²¹⁶⁴ This educated, humanist merchant may well be an exception, but it was usually quite easy for a less-educated merchant to find a notary who could help out. There are numerous commercial documents prepared by notaries from Germany in the Medici archive in Florence.²¹⁶⁵ Nikolaus Perckheimer sent bills of exchange in Latin from Cologne to Rome.²¹⁶⁶

2158 ASFi, MAP 13, no. 74: *El mio gharzone vi lasciai, dite, è triste, e però di più presto in qua lo rimanderete, arei charo; e di chossi vi priegho mi diciate che vizio à perch'io facevo chonto, inparata la lingham, metterlo a lo viaggio di Vinegia. Mecho istette 3 anni, e non gli trov(a)i vizio se none ch'era molto istizioso. Avissatemene in servizio lo meglio potete.*

2159 Bruchhäuser (1989), p. 184; Böninger (2006), p. 264: *Ano domini 1460 a di 16. Dezember hat ihm sein Vater von hinaus gesendet gen Florenz, da welsch lernen reden, darnach in den 1465 Jarn dj 18 abril zog er dan auss und kom her haym.*

2160 See p. 209.

2161 Schulte (1900), p. 595; Bruchhäuser (1989), p. 184.

2162 YUSA, 89, 1694.

2163 Schneider (1988b), p. 25.

2164 Reimann (1935), pp. 1–7.

2165 See Camerani Marri (1951).

2166 See Weissen (2021), pp. 568–570.

For the Italians, Latin was always on hand, although it had already been largely replaced by the vernacular as the language of business in the thirteenth century. For a *garzone*, not only the *abacco* and the *mercatura* were part of his apprenticeship in a bank, but always *grammatica* as well. Although Italians, for understandable reasons, preferred to speak their mother tongue whenever possible, they were still almost always capable of reading a letter in Latin, and were frequently able to write one in the language. However, Latin was almost never used between Italian merchants. Thus, a note from October 1438, written by an employee of Filippo Borromei's bank in Geneva to his colleague in Antwerp, represents a significant exception: *Ultimam meam tibi scripsi per Basileam sub litteris illorum de Medicis*.²¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, there were Florentine merchants, such as Francesco d'Altobianco degli Alberti, who even composed poetry in Latin.²¹⁶⁸

As Italians dominated the business, they not only set the rules of the game, but also to a large degree the working language. They hardly suffered from a language barrier, because they expected as a matter of course their counterpart to solve the problem. It was up to the Germans to learn Italian or to look for other ways of exchanging information with the Italians. For the Florentines, therefore, there was hardly any pressure to learn foreign idioms. Armando Saponi formulated succinctly: "Il problema dell'apprendere delle lingue straniere ... era pressoché inesistente."²¹⁶⁹

The experiences of Biliotti, Bueri, and Rucellai proved to the Curia-based banks that many of the challenges of commercial activity in a market in which they had little familiarity with its language, laws, and customs could be solved directly on the spot. Language barriers did not alarm them: they were used to doing business in many foreign lands. A hostile attitude of local trading forces against the Florentines existed briefly towards Baglioni, but it was quickly overcome. The reprisals against Florentines authorized by King Sigismund in 1418 at the request of Frederick Deys appear to have impressed them, but no actual damage can be ascertained.²¹⁷⁰ In the following decades of the fifteenth century, no trade barriers in a German city are known of that were explicitly directed against Florentines.

Disputes between Florentines were always put before the courts in their hometown. Bartolomeo Biliotti and Deigo degli Alberti carried out their conflicts regarding business in Cologne and Basel in Florence. In all other cases, the venue was the seat of the company. Lamberteschi, who as an exile could not be summoned before the Mercanzia, argued with his fellow-countryman Giovanozzo Mozzi and the Veronese Pietro Guarienti before the court in Basel (*Schultheissengericht*). If account books were decisive for the judicial decision, Italians were commissioned to evaluate them. Notaries also played a role as translators, as a quarrel

2167 ABIB, Famiglia, Filippo di Vitaliano.

2168 Weissen (2000).

2169 Saponi (1975), p. 52.

2170 On Baglioni's position in Lübeck, see Esch (1966), p. 348; Fouquet (1998), p. 198. – On Deys, see page 58.

between Raffaello di Jacopo Vecchiotti and a woman from Nuremberg shows. When the Florentine demanded the outstanding funds after the death of her husband, the account books of the deceased written in German were translated into Italian by a notary, so that the two parties would have a level playing field.²¹⁷¹ Guasparre Spinelli despaired around 1470 in his attempts to have the courts in Nuremberg collect his deposits from the Rummel and the Meuting families. Not even the pope's intervention brought him so much as a florin.²¹⁷² Nevertheless, no complaints regarding the administration of German justice have been documented, and fears of not getting justice in Germany seem not to have played a role in the strategic deliberations of the Florentines.

2171 StadtAN, B 14/II, N, cc. 37v, 70r, and 88v.

2172 Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, B Laden, Urkunde Nr. 32.