

INHERITANCE IN AN IMPORTANT FAMILY OF JEWISH BANKERS:
THE CASE OF DA CAMERINOS

Testaments are for historians an essential type of documentary source: through them, we can recognize the real wealth of a person and also identify his/her family environment, social context, and relationship with other members of his/her family. In addition to this, the Middle Ages witnessed not only the recovery of the Roman legal tradition in the matter of wills, but also the contribution of the Christian religion, which saw in the will a tool of redemption (through, for example, the so called *legati pro anima*).¹ Studies on medieval testaments, for this reason, have multiplied in Europe since the late 1960s, being particularly numerous in French, English, and Italian historiography.²

By comparing someone's last will with others of the same period, we can infer about the hereditary praxes that exist in a particular time. And, in the case of a Jew, his testament could also explain a series of relationships with Christian society (for example, the case of legacies donated to Christian Charitable Organisations), or the prevalent customs, or the numerous relationships between various families — also known as 'res publica hebreorum' (as named by the historian Michele Luzzati).³

The unquestionable importance of 'making a last will' became, through the centuries, not only a way of transmitting of property, but also an expression of individuality. It could suggest that, in a Jewish family, living in a profoundly Christian context (like European medieval society), the practice of making a last will was extremely important in order to affirm and preserve, at least, one's identity, traditions, and habits.

But this is not the situation that I uncovered studying the Da Camerino family. I already had the possibility of investigating the history of this family, a particularly large one, that was present with their pawn shops, simultaneously, in the Marche, as well as in Venetian, Neapolitan, and Tuscan cities. The family, probably coming from Rome and attested in Camerino at least since the XIV Century, also had a fundamental role in the Florentine Jewish settlement in the following century: we have to remember that, in reality, Florence had become at the time a financial and cultural capital of extreme importance for Italian Jews (as, of course, for Christians).⁴

Through the study of archival documents it was possible to find only four testaments of this family's members: three of them are of its house-

¹ This point is explained well by Eleonora Rava, in the introduction to her recent book «*Volens in testamento vivere*». *Testamenti a Pisa, 1240-1320*, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, Roma 2016.

² For an essential, but, at the same time, extremely useful bibliography see E. RAVA, «*Volens in testamento vivere*», cit., pp. XVIII-XXII. For the legal aspects of testaments in the Middle Ages see also G. ROSSI, *Il testamento nel Medioevo fra dottrina giuridica e prassi*, in M.C. ROSSI (ed.), *Margini di libertà: testamenti femminili nel Medioevo. Atti del convegno internazionale*, Cierre, Verona 2010, pp. 45-70.

³ M. LUZZATI, *Banchi e insediamenti ebraici nell'Italia centro-settentrionale fra tardo Medio-*

evo e inizi dell'Età moderna, in C. VIVANTI (ed.), *Gli ebrei in Italia. I. Dall'Alto Medioevo all'età dei ghetti*, Einaudi, Torino 1996, pp. 173-235.

⁴ See my *I da Camerino: una famiglia ebraica italiana fra Trecento e Cinquecento*, Palumbi Edizioni, Ascoli Piceno 2015. On the Florentine medieval and early modern Jewish settlement see U. CASSUTO, *Gli ebrei a Firenze nell'età del Rinascimento*, Galletti e Cocci, Firenze 1918; M. CIARDINI, *I banchieri ebrei in Firenze nel secolo XV e il Monte di Pietà fondato da Girolamo Savonarola*, Borgo San Lorenzo 1907; M. LUZZATI, *Dal prestito al commercio: gli ebrei nello Stato fiorentino nel secolo XVI*, in *Italia Judaica*, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Roma 1986, pp. 67-90; M. LUZZATI, *Gli ebrei*

holder, Emanuele di Bonaiuto, and the other was dictated by his wife, Gemma di Salomone di Aliuccio da Fano, once she was widowed. Let us consider the characteristics of these documents.

Emanuele di Bonaiuto da Camerino died in August 1498, and his testament from 1496 is not the only one that has reached us: we know also of two other documents, one from 1476 and another from 1483.

His last will, written on April 5th 1476,⁵ starts with Emanuele's decision to be buried in the Jewish graveyard of San Miniato al Tedesco and to have a tombstone, on his grave, with his name in the Hebrew alphabet attached to it. He bequeaths to the Jewish poor one hundred *fiorini d'oro*, to his *diletissima* mother — Donnella del fu Ser Mele da Civitanova — the usufruct of his property, and to his wife Gemma a fund of one thousand *fiorini d'oro*. The interest coming from this fund (about 150 gold florins per year) was to be divided equally between aid to the poor amongst the Jews, providing dowries for poor girls (not only Jewish ones but also Christians), and the paying of teachers (*magistri*) that would educate the poor Jews in *lingua et ydiuma ed scientia et lege hebreorum*.

This expenditure was to be supervised by a group of Jews elected, annually, for the division of taxes between his fellow countrymen of the Marca Anconetana.

To his beloved wife, who had always demonstrated *fides, caritas e bona et sincera voluntas et affectio*, he makes acquittance of his

property's administration and he grants her to live in their house, if she will remain unmarried.

Furthermore, Emanuele assigns a silver lamp and a *palio* to Florence's synagogue or to Camerino's synagogue (depending on the choice of his heirs), and one hundred *fiorini d'oro* to the *signore* da Varano.⁶

His brother Abramo and, after him, his nephew Lazzaro (they inherit also a half of Emanuele's library heritage and the family's properties) and his cousin's son, Dattilino di Salomone, became his heirs. But it is stated that, if Abramo and Lazzaro should act against his will, they should be replaced by Gemma's brother, Elia del fu Salomone di Aliuccio da Fano.

San Giovanni Valdarno,⁷ instead, is fundamental in the testament of November 18th 1483:⁸ it is an important place, second only to Florence and Camerino, in regard to the family's economic assets.⁹

Emanuele decides to ensure to his wife the ownership and the unconditional usufruct of the house and the properties situated in Valdarno, and he doesn't forget to recommend her to use part of her two hundred *fiorini d'oro*, deposited in Florence at the banco della Vacca, *ad expeditionem ornamentorum cuiusdam oratorii facti et contracti per ipsum Emanuellem in domo habitationis ipsius Emanuellis siti in Castro Sancti Johannis* and in the related *studio ebreorum*.

Compared to the previous testament, it can be observed that his brother, Abramo, is replaced by the heirs of his uncle Vitale di Salo-

nella società e nell'economia fiorentina del secondo Quattrocento: osservazioni ed ipotesi, in «Italia» VIII n. 1-2 (1989), pp. 53-61; M. LUZZATI, *Firenze e le origini della banca moderna*, in «Studi storici» 2 (1987), pp. 423-434; S.H. MARGULIES, *Un congresso di notabili ebrei tenuto a Firenze nel 1428*, in «Rivista Israelitica» 2 (1905), pp. 169-178; A. VERONESE, *Una societas ebraico-cristiana in docendo tripudiarum sonare ac cantare nella Firenze del Quattrocento*, in M. PADOVAN (ed.), *Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro e la danza nelle corti italiane del XV secolo*, Pacini Editore, Pisa 1990, pp. 51-57.

⁵ Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Notarile Antecosimiano, n. 16842, Pietro di Antonio da Vinci, cc. 147r/151r.

⁶ On the relationships between the Da Camerino family and the Varano family see my *I da Camerino*,

cit., pp. 62-63. For more on the da Varano family more in general see P.L. FALASCHI, *Orizzonti di una dinastia*, in A. DE MARCHI, P.L. FALASCHI (eds), *I da Varano e le arti, Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Camerino 4-6 ottobre 2001*, Gianni Maroni, Ascoli Piceno 2003, vol. I, pp. 30-31.

⁷ For more on San Giovanni Valdarno in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period see F. CARDINI, *Breve storia di San Giovanni Valdarno*, Pacini Editore, Pisa 2007; ID., *Dalla "Terra nuova" alla città contemporanea: Storia di San Giovanni Valdarno*, Pacini Editore, Pisa 2009; see also D. FRIEDMAN, P. PIRILLO, *Le Terre Nuove*, Olschki, Firenze 2004, *passim*.

⁸ ASFi, Notarile Antecosimiano, n. 16842, Pietro di Antonio da Vinci, cc. 170r/173r.

⁹ See my *I da Camerino*, 104-110 and *passim*.

mone, to whom belong a half of the synagogue's vestments that Emanuele owned in Florence, Camerino, and other places. The other half is destined to his nephew Lazzaro di Abramo, who will receive his Hebrew books too.

Continuing our analysis, we note that in his will of July 8th 1496,¹⁰ his nephew Lazzaro del fu Abramo, must send one hundred *florini d'oro* to Anselmo di Jacob da Camposampiero, in Venice, who will send them to Jerusalem, together with two big silver lamps, to Obadiah da Bertinoro.¹¹ Emanuele's contacts with rabbi Obadiah were close and frequent and were the basis of a relationship marked by friendship and esteem. The da Bertinoro, coming from a family of moneylenders, had perhaps already known the da Camerinos in 1478, when he was in the homonymous city in the Marche.¹² In 1484, together with Abramo di Salomone da Cortona and Abramo di Salomone da Perugia, he was chosen as *arbiter* in an important patrimonial division between Abramo and Emanuele di Bonaiuto, Angelo di Vitale, and Dattilino di Salomone.¹³ Just before leaving for Jerusalem (1486), he deposited his money in the Florentine *banco della Vacca*, agreeing with Emanuele to receive the revenue each year (100 ducats) in the Holy Land, in order to live quietly away from home.¹⁴ The letters sent by Obadiah to his brother (who resided in Florence and had some large sums invested in the da Camerino's bank), show us that the agreement lasted for several years without any sort of problem. In particular, in August 1489, Obadiah da Bertinoro wrote that Emanuele di Bonaiuto, whom he calls *rabbi* as a sign of profound respect and consideration, regularly sent the agreed sum, along with 25 ducats more

to offer to the Temple, to buy lantern oil, and to help the poor.¹⁵ Lastly, Obadiah and his successors will be involved in the administration of the Temple itself (we can then assume that Emanuele had a role in that administration).

In the testament of 1496 we also find a legacy of two hundred *lire* to the Monte di Pietà and 100 *lire* to the *Società di San Martino dei poveri vergognosi di Firenze*. This is very interesting because it shows how the bequests to charitable organizations were also present in Jewish testaments, although, of course, the Jews were not motivated by the same Christian understanding of the salvation of the soul.¹⁶ This is perhaps a testimony to the degree of integration of the Jews into the Christian society of the time.

But, looking back at the testament we are analysing, his *dilectissima* Gemma is now indicated as the only heir of all the properties, included four full coffers in the customs' hold in Bologna, and Emanuele is concerned with equally dividing his book patrimony.

His library, conserved in Florence and in San Giovanni Valdarno, is destined in equal parts to Angelo di Vitale da Camerino's sons, to Dattilino di Salomone, and to Abramo di Dattilo di Abramo da San Miniato's sons. To Angelo di Salomone da Viterbo, he bequeaths *unum librum hebraice scriptum et seu impressum* called *diurno*, and to Gemma's nephews, Consiglio e Ventura di Elia del fu Salomone da Fano, a *libro vocato diurno, hebraice scriptum, in carta edina et uno alio libro in quo scripta est hebraice pars Biblie in carta edina*, contained in the aforementioned coffers in Bologna.

Finally, he also has regard for his brother Leone's descendants, or rather the sons of

¹⁰ ASFi, Notarile Antecosimiano, n. 16841, Pietro di Antonio da Vinci, cc. 316r/319r.

¹¹ On Obadiah da Bertinoro see E. ARTOM, A. DAVID, *From Italy to Jerusalem. The Letters of Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro from the Land of Israel*, Ramat Gan 1997; G. BUSI, *Ovadyah da Bertinoro. Lettere dalla Terra Santa*, Luisé, Rimini 1991; ID., *Ovadyah Yare da Bertinoro e la presenza ebraica in Romagna nel Quattrocento*, Zamorani, Torino 1989; A. TOAFF, 'Ovadyah da Bertinoro nella realtà italiana del suo tempo, in M. PERANI (ed.), *L'interculturalità dell'ebraismo*, Longo Angelo, Ravenna 2004, pp. 257-268.

¹² Sezione di Archivio di Stato di Camerino (SASC), Notarile di Camerino, Ser Antonio Pascucci n. 1006, carte non numerate.

¹³ ASFi, Notarile Antecosimiano n. 15783, Ser Francesco di Ottaviano da Arezzo, cc. 140r/153r.

¹⁴ TOAFF, 'Ovadyah da Bertinoro, cit., *passim*.

¹⁵ BUSI, *Ovadyah da Bertinoro*, cit., pp. 65-70.

¹⁶ In regard to making a will in order to save the soul through pious legacies see for example E. RAVA, *I testamenti raccontano: brevi storie 'livornesi' nel tardomedioevo*, in «Nuovi Studi Livornesi» vol. XV (2008), pp. 13-36.

Marchigiana and Josef di Samuele di Consiglio da Gubbio, to whom he bequeaths ten *Fiorini d'oro* as dowries for their daughters and as a salary of a *magistrum docentem* for their son.

Gemma's last will, written in Florence on July 5th 1499,¹⁷ is in perfect continuity with her husband's one. Firstly, the woman wants to be buried in San Miniato, with her husband, and names as her heirs Salomone and Angelo di Abramo da San Miniato (which was named as heir also by Emanuele, if Gemma were to decide to remarry). She also reconfirms a bond of one hundred and fifty *Fiorini d'oro* with the da Fano family, that was already present in her husband's testament, bequeathed to her nephews Consiglio and Bonaventura, sons of her brother Elia, on condition that they invest twenty florins per year for two years for the salary of Hebrew professors (*magistri*). That legacy was the revenue of a deposit in Ferrara's *banco de' Sabbioni* and *banco dei preziosi*.

At the same time, it is interesting for us to examine the list of these luxury goods because they testify to, as does the patrimony of books (which we will discuss later), a way of life comparable to that of a contemporary medieval Christian family. Indeed, in the two coffers that Gemma bequeaths to her nephews, there are: twelve gold knives and twelve gold forks, a pair of silver knives, a silver pommel, two pairs of French silver knives, a ruff with pearls, a pendant, a *rubino balascio*,¹⁸ a diamond and five pearls tied in gold, a precious pearl and an emerald tied in gold, a precious sapphire tied in gold, a precious diamond tied in gold, and another precious sapphire.

To her other nephew, Manuele, son of her brother Daniele, she bequeaths one hundred *Fiorini d'oro* (as was the request of her husband, who wrote it in many private documents), and another ten *Fiorini* derived from the sale of their Florentine house goods.

And yet, in continuity with the relationship of Emanuel and the da San Miniato family, Gemma bequeaths to Abramo del fu Dattilo da San Miniato and his sons the house of San Giovanni Valdarno, without the orchard, that has the value of forty *Fiorini*. If this is sold, the proceeds should be donated to the synagogue of San Giovanni, which was very important for Emanuele di Bonaiuto.

In regard to their book heritage, the *testatrix* confirms her husband's wishes.

Finally, Emanuele's interest for the Holy Land is also present in Gemma's will: even if it is not found in that testament, it exists in a codicil, dictated in Ferrara in 1502,¹⁹ with which she undertakes to send one hundred *Fiorini d'oro* to the poor in Jerusalem.

The examined testaments testify a common will and a harmony of intents (first of all, the exclusion of Emanuele's own family from the legacy) in a 'well-matched' couple, as we say today. That is testified by the fact that this couple never split, even though they never had children. And that is precisely the probable cause for their propensity to make last wills, which seems to have no similarities with their other family members.

I think that this hypothesis can be confirmed by the opposite case of Salomone di Vitale da Camerino and his father, who both died without any testament. Salomone, died in 1463 circa, leaving both his parents, his wife Rosa di Salomone di Aleuccio da Fano, and their sons Davide (four years old), Dattilo (three years old), Gentile (eight years old), and Fiore (six years old).

In 1466 the widow, who was probably preparing for a new 'useful' marriage, had bequeathed the custody of her children and the administration of her property to Salomone's mother, Rosa del fu Dattilo di Montalcino: it may

¹⁷ ASFi, Notarile Antecosimiano, n. 20097, Benedetto di Niccolò Tempi, cc. 56r/57v. See also my *I da Camerino*, 151-152 and E. BORGOLOTTO, E. GARRUTO, *Testamenti femminili toscani del Quattrocento*, in M. LUZZATI - C. GALASSO (eds), *Donne nella storia degli ebrei d'Italia*, Giuntina, Firenze 2007, pp. 70-72. On other Jewish women's testaments and, more in general, on women's testaments see M.C.

ROSSI (ed.), *Margini di libertà: testamenti femminili nel medioevo. Atti del convegno internazionale*, Cierre, Verona 2010.

¹⁸ Is a particular type of spinel ruby, with a characteristic purple-red/pink colour.

¹⁹ Archivio di Stato di Ferrara, Notarile Antico, matr. 283, Bartolomeo Codegori pacco 7, 1502, cc. 193r/v.

appear strange, but from the same notarial deed we understand that Salomone's father, Vitale, had died in 1465 without leaving a last will.²⁰

It could be by chance but appears illogical that, considering the son's early death, the father had not decided to settle any legacy issues through a testament. Furthermore, the properties to bequeath were many, although fewer than Emanuele di Bonaiuto's.

In Rosa del fu Dattilo da Montalcino's inventory we encounter the sixteenth part of a Florentine society's capitals (with their profits) constituted by the banks of della Vacca, del Borghese, and dei Quattro Pavoni, as well many goods such as: lavish female clothes, which were worth about four or eight *fiorini*, a trousseau for the babies (with laundry and clothes adorned with pearls and made in silver tissue), equally lavish male clothes, fifteen strings of pearls worth ten *fiorini d'oro*, a diamond, a pearl, a *rubino balascio*, two turquoises, a sapphire, a ruby, all of them clustered in rings worth thirty *fiorini d'oro*, an ounce and three silver dinars worth half a *fiorino d'oro*, and other objects.

It seems that having a direct progeny was a strong factor in regard to the making of last wills or not. But, if we were to hypothesize further, we could say that being in a large and extended family was also an important factor. Indeed, if we examine the document about Salomone di Vitale's case, we note that Emanuele di Bonaiuto was the 'director' and the guarantor of all the decisions made in lack of testaments.

With that said and considering the fact that important decisions about present and future legacies were made through arbitrations and notarial agreements, we can conclude by saying that making last wills was useful only in those cases in which someone wanted to free oneself from one's family policy and when there were no sons who would have inherited the properties (but not the shareholding in parent companies linked to banks) by law or *de plano*.

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SUMMARY

The unequivocal importance that 'making a testament' has assumed over the centuries, not only as a practice of transmission of goods, but also as the expression of one's individuality, could lead us to think that, particularly in a large Jewish family, all the members felt the necessity of leaving a last will. Unexpectedly, this is not the reality I found while studying the case of the Da Camerino family.

KEYWORDS: Testament; Family; Bankers; Middle Ages; Modern Era.

²⁰ ASFi, Notarile Antecosimiano, n. 15337, Pietro di Giovanni Nori, cc. 40r/41v.

