

Bruscoli, Francesco Guidi, Bartolomeo Marchionni
“Homem de grossa fazenda” (ca. 1450 –1530): Un mercante
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From the early fifteenth century onwards, Lisbon played host to an important community of Tuscan merchants and bankers, some of whom invested in the overseas fleets and trade, providing capital for most of the early voyages of the *Carreira da Índia*. Others even personally embarked on Portuguese ships, often never returning to Europe. Bartolomeo Marchionni, Girolamo Sernigi, Giovanni da Empoli, Francesco Corbinelli, and Piero Strozzi were among the most important merchants who took part, either directly or indirectly, in the Portuguese expansion. This fact is already recorded in the historiography: Federigo Melis, Jacques Heers, Virginia Rau, Carmen Radulet, Marco Spallanzani, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, among others, have investigated this subject over the past fifty years. Guidi Bruscoli’s new in-depth study of the Florentine merchant, financier and banker Bartolomeo Marchionni (ca. 1450–1530) has renewed interest in the role of Italian (and, in particular, Florentine) agents, networks and mercantile practices in the early establishment of Portugal’s trading empire. His book sheds fresh light on one of the most outstanding foreign agents who was active in Lisbon for more than fifty years, between 1468 and 1530, through the reigns of Afonso V, João II, Manuel I, and João III, and was involved in almost every kind of commercial and financial activity linked to the expansion, ranging from acquiring a dominant position in the Madeiran sugar trade to financing slave trade in and from Africa, and organizing expeditions to India, eventually including the opening of a *feitoria* (factory) in Cananor (present-day Kannur, in the state of Kerala, India). He was even granted the possibility of naturalization by Manuel I, quite probably in return for the financial services that he had rendered to the Portuguese king through the concession of generous loans.

Though well-grounded in previous Portuguese and international historiography, Guidi Bruscoli’s book is also supported by impressive and fruitful original documentary research undertaken in several European cities, including Lisbon, Almada, Évora,

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Simancas, Florence, Pisa, Venice, and Mantua. This work led to the discovery of several previously unknown documents, nineteen of which are fully transcribed and made available to readers in the book's appendix.

The work is divided into two main parts, with a total of five chapters. The first part focuses on Marchionni's life, seen from two main perspectives. The first, 'La vita', deals with Marchionni's biography, from his birth and apprenticeship in Florence to his arrival in Lisbon in 1470 under the protection of the Cambini family, his marriage and his subsequent significant business success, closely linked to both the Portuguese mercantile and political élites and the Crown, and finally his death in 1530. The second part focuses instead on his widespread network of collaborators and partners, in Portugal and in Europe, encompassing the vast and interlinked commercial networks of Florentine, Genoese and Portuguese merchant families and companies active in both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea basin, from Madeira and the Azores, to Spain, France, Flanders, England, and of course Italy.

The second part, through its three highly detailed chapters, explores all the business activities in which Marchionni, his collaborators and partners became involved under his leadership, through their financial participation in voyages and trade along the Atlantic coasts of Africa, the Atlantic islands, Brazil, and the huge oceanic spaces of the *Carreira da Índia*, linking them to the European markets and commercial networks in the Mediterranean Sea and in Northern Europe.

More specifically, chapter three studies merchandise imported and exported to and from Lisbon, focusing on gold, cloth and pepper (*malagueta*) from Africa, sugar from Madeira and *pau brasil* from Brasil. Chapter four analyses the trade in African slaves, from Africa to Portugal, Valencia, Seville, and also Florence, detailing its costs and profits, as well as the role played by merchants such as Marchionni in connecting several traders in the two continents. Finally, the last chapter concentrates on Marchionni's financial involvement in several voyages of the *Carreira da Índia*, including those led by Pedro Álvares Cabral (1500), João da Nova (1501), Vasco da Gama (1502), Afonso de Albuquerque (1503), Lopo Soares de Albergaria (1504), Francisco de Almeida (1505), Tristão da Cunha (1506), Fernão Coutinho (1509), Diogo Mendes de Vasconcelos (1510), Diogo Lopes de Sequeira (1518), and Jorge de Brito (1520).

Guidi Bruscoli clearly shows the crucial and specific role played by Marchionni and other foreign traders, bankers and financiers active in Lisbon in importing and re-exporting capital and commodities (including slaves) all over Europe: Marchionni was able to attract

and move wealth from many European cities and direct it towards Lisbon and the expanding routes of Portuguese navigations where investments looked profitable, interconnecting different continents and different areas of Europe. Then he was able to use the same networks to resell spices, slaves, and all sorts of merchandise acquired through the voyages and the first attempts at colonization. In doing so, Guidi Bruscoli neatly underlines the collaboration between Florentine and local Portuguese capital, with funding that came from both mercantile élites and people of lower means. Through his links with Florentine merchant bankers, Marchionni was able to collect both large and small investments, through which he managed not only to share the expenses of equipping the Portuguese ships of the *Carreira da Índia*, but even to make loans to the Portuguese Crown.

Concepts such as “network” and “trade” are repeatedly (ab)used in the historiography of the Portuguese and European expansion, most of the time without providing any detailed content to qualify them. The strength of Guidi Bruscoli’s book lies precisely in its ability to define and deconstruct Marchionni’s networks, giving names and surnames to their members, and revealing their goals and strategies, as well as showing and analyzing the complexities of the merchant’s trading activities in great detail, while, at the same time, explaining to his readers how and why cloth, gold, and slaves from Africa, sugar from Madeira, and tapestries from Flanders, among many other goods, gradually became part of a single market that spanned four continents.