



Two identical xylographs:

- In the book of Jacopo da Cessole "Libro del giuoco di Scacchi" (1478): the xylograph represents a piece of chess.
- in the book of Poliziano, "Le Stanze" (1494): the xylograph represents Giuliano de' Medici.

(Abstract)

The edition from us consulted is the **Volgarizzamento del libro de' costumi e degli offizii de' nobili sopra il giuoco degli scacchi** of monk **Jacopo da Cessole** printed in Milan by Giulio Ferrario in 1829. (This edition is similar to the **Libro del giuoco di Scacchi intitolato de' costumi degl'huomini, et degli offitii de' nobili** printed in Florence from **Antonio Miscomini** in 1493. The Florentine edition is the translation in vulgar of the book in Latin of Cessole printed in Milan in 1478).

1) The two xylographs

In the "Volgarizzamento" is reproduced the following xylograph:



In the **Stanze di messer Angelo Poliziano cominciate per la giostra del magnifico Giuliano di Piero de' Medici** (1), printed to Florence in 1494, in correspondence of the octave 26 (2) we find the following xylograph:



The xylography is the artistic technique of the incision on wood of a figure or text to get a press of it on paper. After to have realized the incision on the wood tablet, the lines are inked in relief of the figure. The tablet is pressed then on a sheet of paper getting the press.

To an accurate control the two xylographs perfectly appear

identical.

With a technique used by the graphs we have reproduced the two xylographs on transparent paper. The overlap doesn't leave doubts. All the details perfectly coincide.

Therefore the same matrix (the tablet in wood) was used both for the book of Cessole and for that of Poliziano.

The matrix can be used more times for the press and the reprint of the same book. But in the epoch it was possible to use the same matrix for different books?

And so **Giuliano de' Medici**, young rider, winning of a joust and brother of the most famous **Lorenzo de' Medici**, was transformed into a **wood rider**, in a **chess piece**.

The hypotheses on this mystery (mistake, confusion among the matrixes, loss of the matrix, conspiracy against the Medici) they are exposed in my book and in the story to episodes "Antiche recensioni".

2) Adherence of the drawing to the text.

A) The xylographs of the book of Cessole.

It is possible to recognize a good adherence of the drawing of the xylographs with the text written by Cessole.



King



Queen

Bishop



Pawn of Tower, King's side



Pawn of Knight, King's side

Pawn of King

Pawn of Queen

Pawn of Bishop, Queen's side

Pawn of Knight, Queen's side

Only in few cases we find mistakes or omissions:

Pawn of Bishop, King's side

The pen is found on the table and not to the ear of the man.

Pawn of Tower, Queen's side

The man have the dice in the left hand and not in that right.

Tower

The inside of the mantle is decorated to the same way of the headgear of fur (used by judges and by the chivalrous orders).

B) The xylograps of the book of Poliziano.

In the four xylographs of the book there is not excessive

adherence to the text.

Three of the frames of the incisions of the "Stanze" they have a similar structure, that of the "Rider" it doesn't seem to belong to the series of the "Stanze".

The xylograph of the Giuliano de' Medici it seems perfect for a **"Rider" for a joust** not for a rider that is prepared to go to hunting (see octave 26).

3 - Observations on the job of the engraver.

A) The posture of the horse to the footstep was the preferred one at the painters and sculptors because it gave solemnity and strength to the figure. This method has been used by Donatello in the monument to the Gattamelata (Padova)

from Paolo Uccello in the fresco of Giovanni Acuto (1436 - Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore).

In these examples the horse is to the footstep; the rider is rigid on the stirrups of the saddle. Perhaps source of inspiration for the engraver of the Rider it was the fresco (equestrian portrait) of the Niccolò da Tolentino (1456 - Cathedral in Florence)

realized by Andrea del Castagno.

If we compare this masterpiece with the drawing of the incision of the Tower (slightly different from that of the "Rider" only in the inclination of the head of the horse) we observe some interesting affinities: the same position of the legs of the horse to the footstep; the same inclination of the head of the horse - with the wide open mouth -; the rider is not more rigid but slipped on the stirrups that he seems to push with strength to incite the horse.

B) The joust is a competition of ability between Riders and not a battle. The lance and the other weapons were, in effects, bevel for avoiding serious damages. The rider was covered of armour and also the horse had the head and the neck covered by an armor to avoid hits of lance.

The xylograph of the rider of the book of Cessole it seems **really a ready rider for the joust.**

Also the side introduced by the drawing (the right) it is an ambiguous element: in such way the mace doesn't appear (not used in that particular joust) even if is also mentioned in the text of Cessole.

The xylograph seems to have been done for a double use since its graphic creation.

C) Viewing and analyzing different engravings (of books Florentines of the period 1480-1490) we can do an interesting observation to individualize the artistic run of the engraver, limitedly to the graphic aspect of the frames.

These are those used for the "pieces" of the chess of the book of Cessole:

It is easy to individualize some common elements: the four panels to the angles with floral graphic motive; similar elements perfectly, others upside-down in horizontal sense. We can consider the frame of the incisions an expressive model, a recurrent element and frequently used by a same engraver (or from the same shop of engravers).

The frame of the "Rider" of Cessole has been used for some of the xylographs of another book of Poliziano, the Orfeo (printed in 1494).

We have found tightened similarities among this frame and those of other books of the period 1493/94.

Notes:

1) Book in vulgar, in two parts (of 125 octaves and of 46 octaves) composed by Angelo (or Agnolo) Poliziano (Angelo Ambrogini, says the **Poliziano** - Montepulciano 1454 - Florence 1494) and not completed for the death of Giuliano de' Medici happened during the conspiracy of the **Pazzi** (1478).

2)

*L'ardito Iulio, al giorno ancora acerbo,
allor ch'al tufo torna la civetta,
fatto frenare il corridor superbo,
verso la selva con sua gente eletta
prese el cammino, e sotto buon riserbo
seguial de' fedel can la schiera stretta;
di ciò che fa mestieri a caccia adorni,
con archi e lacci e spiedi e dardi e corni.*

Carmelo Coco.

[Back to Home Page](#)

[Back to Index "English version"](#)