

# Mutations en Méditerranée

ISSN : 3002-1308

Publication director : Aix-Marseille Université

Scientific direction and publishing : Mesopolhis

2 | 2024

Blé, vigne, olivier : transformations des pratiques et des représentations d'une triade méditerranéenne

Wheat, vines, and olive trees: transformations in the practice and representations of a Mediterranean triad

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 <https://www.revue-mem.com/365>

### Electronic reference

Felipe Mendes Erra, « The emotions in the wheat economy of Medieval Italy », *Mutations en Méditerranée* [Online], 2 | 2024, Online since 01 November 2024, connection on 20 December 2024. URL : <https://www.revue-mem.com/365>

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# The emotions in the wheat economy of Medieval Italy

*Émotions dans l'économie du froment de l'Italie médiévale*

**Felipe Mendes Erra**

## OUTLINE

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Introduction

Theory of Emotions and conceptual tools

Dearth and famine in Leonardo Bruni: fear and charity

The famine of 1329 and the wheat merchant's point of view

Charity, subjectivity, and political action

Conclusion

## TEXT

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*I'd like to thank Fapesp (Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo) for funding this research.*

## Introduction

- 1 This article discusses how emotions participated in historical transformations and influenced the field of human action in 14th-century Italia. To this aim, I articulate two arguments, built on two different levels of documentary analysis. First, I defend the idea that the writers of narratives recognized emotions as a central aspect of human action and, therefore, were understood as a crucial factor in political disputes arising from economic dynamics. Second, working closely with a *histoire événementielle*, I analyze how emotions played a fundamental role in the actions of historical actors, focusing especially on times of dearth and famine that occurred in Italy (Tuscany and Puglia) during the fourteenth century.
- 2 To this end, I analyze two sources: Domenico Lenzi's *Specchio Umano*, and Leonardo Bruni's *Historiarum Florentinarum*. There are two compelling reasons to compare these sources: both authors wrote detailed narratives about famine events, and both belonged to different social categories. Leonardo Bruni is a traditional sample of

the discursive point of view elaborated within the Italian aristocracy of the first fifteenth century; conversely, Domenico Lenzi, a wheat merchant, is a rare sample of the perspective elaborated by a member of the urban milieu who did not belong to the political or intellectual elite of the Florentine society. The comparison between narrators from different social categories aims to show that, more than working with the idea of a “common culture” of a time or a city, it is interesting to think how different social categories have constructed contradictory discourses and representations of reality.

- 3 The economy of Tuscany, between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, went through contradictory movements. The intense agropastoral activity and the establishment of regional, interregional, and long-distance networks made possible the process of urbanization and the development of intense commercial and banking activity. However, the same economy was hit by different types of crises: financial crisis and bankruptcy of commercial companies; breaking of agricultural production with heavy climatic fluctuations; paralysis of trade due to wars and military conflicts; demographic collapse caused by plagues. Years of prosperity were interrupted by years of scarcity, forcing the inhabitants of the city to face difficulties in the food supply, confronting either acute inflationary processes in urban markets or, in the worst situation, a hunger crisis.
- 4 The main contribution of this article is to frame an analysis that interweaves economic history with the history of emotions, without establishing any kind of hierarchy between them. Economic history is fundamental for the elaboration of a perspective capable of observing, as far as possible, the adversities and stressors of daily life in Florentine medieval society. The history of emotions provides us with tools to think about the behavioral strategies of the actors involved in economic conflicts. The actions of actors, individual or collective, driven by clusters of emotions, resulted in direct impacts on economic dynamics, transforming the interactions linked to the production, circulation, and consumption of food and, probably, other things.
- 5 To develop this argument, I rely on the conceptual framework of contemporary psychological theories. Beyond any dichotomy between rationality and subjectivity, the apprehension theory offers a

model of functioning in which the unfolding of different emotions occurs in conjunction with cultural values and rational evaluation. The theoretical model is effective for research in history because, despite proposing a universal functioning process, it presents elements that are entirely dependent on the historical context, therefore allowing a historiographical approach to emotions.

- 6 A brief reference to ethical values is inevitable to develop my argument. To this end, I will expose a short reference to the vocabulary constructed by Friar Domenico Cavalca, a contemporary Florentine. The use of Cavalca's text is not an end in itself, but a means to advance intelligibility about the vocabulary and the value system performed by Leonardo Bruni and Domenico Lenzi.

## **Theory of Emotions and conceptual tools**

- 7 Currently, the history of emotions is a mature field, with an extensive bibliography. Different approaches, methodologies, and problems were carried out. The attempt to understand how ancient and medieval authors elaborated concepts about emotions is, in itself, an area with a large number of publications (Casagrande and Vecchio 2015, p. 8; Besnier, Moreau and Renault 2003; Boquet 2005). Additionally, it is possible to mention: the study of the social function of a single emotion, such as anger or fear (Delumeau 1978; Rosenwein 1998); how different emotions functioned in a certain historical period (for the Renaissance, Ricciardelli and Zorzi 2015); and synthesis books about "the emotions in the Middle Ages" (Rosenwein 2016; Boquet and Nagy 2015). As a result, the field of the history of emotions currently offers a great bibliographic richness, and a complete list is beyond the scope (and capacity) of this article.
- 8 Given the problem proposed here, the works of Barbara Rosenwein (2006, 2016) offer an insightful methodology for documentary analysis. Rosenwein's work aligns itself with a particular field of study in psychology: the study of emotions (Lazarus 1991; Barret, Lewis and Haviland-Jones 2016).
- 9 The psychology approach is also central to my argument. In a simplified way, in apprehension theory, emotion is understood as a process,

involving five components (Plutchik and Conte 1997; Scherer 2005; Barish 2009):

1. Apprehension, i.e., the perception and evaluation, by the individual or organism, of an event occurring in the environment, and how this event or stimulus may affect the individual/organism,
2. Motivation, which manifests a tendency towards specific groups of actions, reactions, and behaviors (like “flee or fight”),
3. A somatic component, involving changes in physiology (heartbeat, pupil dilation),
4. The motor factor, related to the expressiveness of the body (tone of voice, gestures, changes in physiognomy),
5. The factor of subjective experience, specific to the field of feelings and personal memories.

10 An emotional experience is, therefore, a complex and dynamic process, with the continuous interaction between cognitive functions of perception, evaluation, and memory; including body expression and physiological reactions; the uses of language; and manners of action and historical transformation (see also Brody 1999).

11 My goal is not to write the history of a specific emotion (anger, love, fear), nor to understand how a set of emotions functioned in a specific way. My objective is to show how emotions played an important role in the *actions* of people who lived in the Late Middle Ages, through the construction of discourse and choices in the public sphere.

## **Dearth and famine in Leonardo Bruni: fear and charity**

12 In the fourteenth century, the economy of the Republic of Florence had five main attributes: a high level of relative urbanization; a commercialized economy; intense manufacturing activity; investments in agricultural production structures; and commercial relations that worked on an international scale (Goldthwaite 2009). In terms of urbanization, before the mortality crises of 1348, it is estimated that 28% of the population lived in cities with more than 5,000 inhabitants, an unusual rate for the pre-industrial period

(Ginatempo and Sandri 1990). Florence, the capital of the Republic, with more than 100,000 inhabitants, emerged as one of the largest urban agglomerations in “Medieval Europe” (Spufford 2002). The monetary system relied on the diffuse use of different monetary species (Day 1968) and included the development of banking activities and bills of exchange (Roover 1953; Jacoby 2005). The urban population was engaged in a myriad of manufacturing and trade activities (Hoshino 1980), resulting in a human landscape marked by intense inequality in levels of appropriation of wealth (Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber 1985; Balestracci 1977).

- 13 The process of urbanization and commercialization promoted strong changes in rural space, developing investment strategies in agricultural production (Roncière 1973) and the formation of a network of rural markets (Roncière 2005). The concentration of wealth, enhanced with the association of rich merchants, allowed the formation of companies that functioned on an international scale, operating in the ports of the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and Northern Europe (Hunt 1994). Despite that, the Republic, governed through collective bodies occupied by a political elite (Najemy 1982; Brucker 1962), was forced to face difficult times. In the second half of the thirteenth century, the political elite developed an arsenal of measures to avoid urban food shortages (Pinto 1978). Nevertheless, acute crises of scarcity hit the population.
- 14 In 1328-1329, the population struggled to access the main food component of their daily diet: bread made from wheat (Villani 1991, p. 1091; for the daily diet, see Montanari 2013). In 1346, a new supply crisis, concerning various products, again struck the entire Republic (Villani 1991, p. 1561). In the second half of the century, chroniclers recorded the years 1374-1375 as years of scarcity (see below). A food crisis was capable of triggering strong riots in the public square, with consequences for economic and political dynamics. Certainly, the revolts of the fourteenth century were a well-studied theme in historiography (Bourin, Cherubini, and Pinto, 2008; Franceschi 1993). However, I think it is possible to shed new light on the agency of the actors involved, applying the methodology developed in the history of emotions (for a similar proposal, see the collection of articles in Lecuppre-Desjardin and Van Bruaene 2005).

- 15 We can start with Leonardo Bruni, a representative writer of the Renaissance, in his work dedicated to the history of Florence (Ianziti 2012). Leonardo Bruni, when referring to the famine of 1346, uses a narrative marked by emotional terms to describe what was probably the worst hunger crisis that occurred in the Italian Peninsula in the fourteenth century.

Altero de hinc anno primo statim vere sollicitam habuit civitatem sterelitatis formido, nec id verna tantum intemperie coeli, quantum superioribus imbribus, qui circa sementem omnia diluerant. Itaque, segetes per paucae in agris et illae ipsae squalidae arentesque cernebantur. Et augebat metum, quod non unam aut alteram Italiae partem, sed totas omnino regiones eadem premebat calamitas. Ex hoc metu caritas primo coorta, eaque ipsa indies augescens. Tandem ubi ad messis tempora ventum est, tunc, re iam ipsa defectum arguente, cum nil fere ex agris reportaretur, circumspicere sese homines, ac futurum horrere, parvosque, iam inde natos et imbecillem turbam miserescere (Bruni 1610, p. 146).

During the spring, the fear of famine engendered heavy thoughts in all the people, because excessive rains had fallen during the sowing period. [...] The fear was greater because the damage to the crops was not seen in a few parts but throughout the entire Italy. [...] With this fear, the famine began. Fear grew each day, until the harvest season, which, indeed, was weak and barren. People looked at each other and feared for the future, and had compassion for young children, and also for the poorest people.

- 16 Bruni's style is composed with mastery of rhetorical tools. The text is constructed through hypotaxis and the conjunctions (additive, explanatory) give precision to the discourse. The rhythm arises from the interchange between long and short sentences. The chronicler's writing is clear; in portraying the famine of 1346, the author begins by explaining how excessive rainfall damaged the sowing period and makes us believe that the hunger crisis stemmed from the crisis in agricultural production. The next period amplifies the tension by detailing that the situation occurred not in one place but spread throughout Italy. The selection of emotional terms creates a dramatic dynamic, as they manifest a growing tension: *formidu*, *metu*, *horrere*, *miserescere*.

- 17 The words used to describe the emotional experience of collective fear are expressed in a gradation of intensity: *formido* (a sense of worry and grief) and *metu* (fear). In the latter case, Bruni creates a sentence of great effect, starting with the expression “the fear was greater because” and ending with the word *calamitas* (calamity).
- 18 Patrick Boucheron argued that the political elites of the period used strategies to combat the fear felt by the population as a way to maintain their power and governability (Boucheron 2013). Here, I want to emphasize that fear is not represented as an instinctive, irrational reaction, but results from the calculation, the ability to make estimates, and knowledge of how climatic variations affected the production of cereal crops. But the famine did not only arouse fear. The chronicler, who represents the point of view of the aristocracy (Fubini 2003), describes that people, with the sight of children and the expectation of hunger, were struck by a feeling that was midway between sorrow and compassion (*miserescere*).
- 19 In Bruni’s narrative, the emotional experience is referred to as a complex experience: it occurs from constant interaction with what we currently call cognitive functions (perception, thought, judgment); it influences sociability, building bonds (*miserescere*) between the richest and the poorest, between adults and children beyond the family circle; and, finally, it is central to human action. Moreover, Bruni constructs a hierarchy based on his description of public emotions. Bruni writes that:

Cum ergo fames haud dubie immineret, solers plane ad hoc civitas in Africa et Sardinia et Sicilia, aliisque locis permultis, magnam vi frumenti comparatam, mari simul terraque, importandum curavit. Nec eo tamen modo evitari potuit, quin difficultes per maximae eo anno subirentur. Turba enim ex agro in urbem mendicatura longis agminibus mulierum puerorumque advenerat. [...] Satis enim premi caritate ipsa multitudinem existimavit civitas (Bruni 1610, p. 147).

The city [of Florence] acted swiftly in an attempt to provide food, sending ambassadors to procure grain in Africa, Sardinia, Sicily, and many other places, by land or sea. Nevertheless, it was impossible to avert [the dearth], and during the year maximum difficulties took place. Many women and children had come from the countryside to



- the city to beg. [...] The city realized that the scarcity caused great suffering in the crowd.
- 20 The chronicler fabricates a duality between “city” and “people”. The first term designates the elite of the Republic, while the second term refers to the heterogeneous Florentine population. It is only later, describing the dearth of 1375, that Bruni explains the motivation that led the urban elite of the Republic to spare no effort to provide food for the “people”.
- 21 In 1375, once more, reduced harvests caused food shortage. According to Bruni, “the famine grew so much [...] that it was difficult for the Florentine people to sustain itself” (“Sterelitas annonae per haec ipsa tempora supervenit civitati [...] ut vix Florentina plebs sustentarentur”, Bruni 1610, p. 180). The situation, however, stemmed not only from an agricultural crisis; political difficulties prevented the importation of wheat that Florence usually practiced from the regions of Emilia and Romagna. In that year, the so-called War of the Eight Saints had begun, opposing the Republic of Florence to the Papal States. The papal legate of Bologna had ordered the severing of the commercial relationship, preventing the usual export of grain to Tuscany (Bruni 1610, p. 179-181).
- 22 Florentine ambassadors traveled to Avignon to fulfill peace negotiations. In the papal court, the ambassadors tried to show that the escalation of violence had occurred because of the series of injustices promoted by the representatives of the Church, a perspective fully adopted by the chronicler (“nec tolerabilis sane iam erat gallorum Clericorum ambitio, qui civitates Italiae servorum habebant loco: nec animos sibi conciliare hominum ulla cura fuerat, sed arcibus murisque compescere”, Bruni 1610, p. 181). In the ambassadors’ speech, emotions emerged as a central component:

Habemus naque civitatem populosissima, et quae plurimum importato indigeat. Cum igitur superiore anno fame laboraret populus noster, ac Bononiae, caeterisque Ecclesia urbibus per magna vis frumenti superesset, neque precibus neque obsecrationibus, neque lacrimis pro infima plebe diffusis impetrare gubernatoribus valuimus, ut de superabundantia sua famescenti plebi nostrae, vel in aliqua saltem particula, subvenerint, cum essemus loco proximi, cum

publice socii, privatim amici. Verum haec, quanque dura sint et inhumana, et charitatis expertia (Bruni 1610, p. 182).

Our city is very populous, and we need to import wheat. The people were in a situation of famine, and the year before we had already suffered from hunger. Although, both in Bologna and in the lands [on the Italian Peninsula] belonging to the Church, there was a great quantity of wheat. But neither by petitions nor by the tears of the multitude, could we obtain anything from the governors that could from abundance bestow any little thing upon our people. [...] Actually, harsh and inhuman this was, and foreign to charity.

- 23 The anaphoras create an effect that gives drama to the rhetorical statement of the ambassadors; again, the use of hypotaxis accurately attributes different emotional states to different collective actors (Table 1). In the chronicler’s narrative construction, the population of Florence is characterized by fear, and the elite is characterized by charitable action. Pity is the feeling of transition to charity, transformed into a virtuous form of public administration. Here, the history of emotions is not distinguished from the history of political discourses (or the political uses of the discourse).

**Table 1. The hierarchy of emotions in Bruni’s *History of Florentine People***

<b>Social Category</b>	People	Urban Elite
<b>Emotion</b>	Fear	Charity
<b>Expression of feeling</b>	Tears (suffering)	Pity
<b>Action</b>	Begging	Import and distribution of cereals

## The famine of 1329 and the wheat merchant’s point of view

- 24 Another manuscript, however, presents a quite different picture of famine. The *Specchio Umano*, which, for the sake of its later publishers, came to be known as *Il Libro del Biadaio* (“The Wheat Merchant’s Book”), was produced in the fourth decade of the fourteenth century by Domenico Lenzi, who identifies himself as a wheat

merchant. It is not possible to assign any modern genre to the content of the text, and the manuscript is an *ensemble* formed by four different compositions: a list of prices of different types of wheat, minor cereals, and legumes, practiced in the city of Florence, between 1310 and 1333; a detailed narrative of the famine of 1329; poems; and illuminations of excellent quality.

- 25 Domenico Lenzi belonged to a different socio-economic category. The only information we have is what the author himself mentions at the beginning of the text: “I, Domenico Lenzi, an ignorant and uncultured wheat merchant” (“per me Domenicho Lenzi, biadaiuolo, grosso y ydiota compositore d’esso”, Lenzi 1978, p. 159). Lenzi argues that he wrote the text “in his native language” because he did not know Latin. However, despite not possessing the level of knowledge of the intellectual elite of the period, this wheat merchant provides three pieces of evidence that he owned a literary culture. Firstly, in enumerating the reasons that led him to write *Specchio Umano*, Lenzi refers to the example of the “ancient authors” and the tradition of texts dedicated to the recording of virtuous actions (on the tradition of history as *magistra vitae*, Koselleck 2004). Secondly, the very title of the work refers to the composition of *mirrors*, a textual category frequently used in the period. Finally, literary analysis argued that Lenzi’s poems, scattered in the manuscript, were strongly influenced by Dante Alighieri (Miglio 1978). In addition, three poems purportedly belonging to Domenico Cavalca, a contemporary Dominican friar residing in Pisa, were inserted into the manuscript (identification made by Giuliano Pinto in Lenzi 1978, p. 465, p. 470, p. 486).
- 26 Unlike Bruni, who, in the examples mentioned, referred to events that occurred in the past and that he knew through reading other chroniclers, we have evidence to believe that the famine of 1328-1329, in *Specchio Umano*, was narrated not only by a local witness but by a social actor directly impacted by the food crisis.
- 27 Lenzi mentioned that, for two years (1328 and 1329), agricultural productivity in the Italian Peninsula suffered a drastic drop, due to climatic variations – perhaps linked to what we now suspect resulted from changes in global temperature (Campbell 2013). We will reflect on how the wheat merchant narrated the famine in three different places: Barletta, Siena, and Florence.

- 28 The city of Barletta, in Puglia, belonged to the Principality of Naples. Puglia participated in the Mediterranean economy as a regular wheat export area; Francesco Pegolotti's *Pratica della Mercatura* quotes that the city of Barletta exported cereals to 23 different cities, including Alexandria, Famagosta, and Mallorca (Pegolotti 1970). Records of the main ports of Puglia (Manfredonia and Bari) mention massive quantities of wheat exported especially to Tuscany, mainly through the great trading companies of Florence (Abulafia 1981). Domenico Lenzi narrated that the first impact of the famine in Barletta was the paralysis of trade. According to Lenzi, the cascade effect followed three stages: 1) the drop in agricultural production; 2) the interruption of trade; 3) the incidence of hunger. The population, however, did not take long to act:

In the city of Barletta, because of the dearth, it was not possible to find cereal grains in the city, because there was little, and what there was was with powerful men, who had hidden it in secret places. The poorest people were in great affliction, [...] and were suffering and moaning that they were dying of hunger. [...]

Some honorable men, along with other poor men, observing the general suffering, began to associate. And then they organized a brigade of about twenty-five men, and they walked to the palace of the city, and drove out the king's representative, and went through the streets, crying: "Let everyone who hides the grain die, and long live our lord king!". The powerful men, when they saw the people walking and shouting in this way, were afraid of being killed. [...]

Some eminent citizens sent messengers to the king's bailiff, who came immediately (from Naples to Barletta) and, forming a new council, discussed what they could do. They decided that those who owned grain should make it available for trade in the public square. And they immediately issued an order. [...] so the public market was supplied, and the city pacified [...]; and whoever wished could obtain grain, giving money in return. [The original quotation from Domenico Lenzi can be found in the Appendix]

- 29 Lenzi's style is entirely different from Bruni's. The use of long sentences accumulates different ideas and relies on the use of repetitions. The first sentence is emblematic: the author uses three clauses

to describe the dearth, only to immediately, afterwards, using the simplest additive conjunction, inform us, surprisingly, that the cereals were stored (and “hidden”) by the elite of the commune. Next, Lenzi uses, in a single sentence, seven verbs to describe the uprising in the city; the actions are linked, again, always by the same conjunction (“and”). In the middle of the uprising, a cry cuts through the air and also through the text, using two clauses with a slogan form. The style, although simple, achieves a masterful effect: the action acquires intense speed, and the contemporary reader is taken by an impression similar to an action movie.

30 In emotional terms, there is a contrast between Leonardo Bruni and Domenico Lenzi. In Leonardo Bruni, the style manifests the predominance of sober humor and rationality. Emotions are concentrated on the words that designate emotions, such as *metu* or *formido*; the chronicler works with clusters for the same emotion and with the gradation of levels of intensity (for an analysis of lexical clusters and intensity, see Edelstein and Shaver 2007). In Domenico Lenzi, emotions fill the very space of the description of actions. When we read that the poorest population was suffering, moaning, and dying, we understand why, in the beginning, the author repeats, in three expressions, the situation of famine. In addition, the author does not hesitate to try to achieve maximum intensity; it is not enough to say that there was hunger: Lenzi describes that the population suffered, lamented, and died slowly. Calamity is not limited to a cold word: the style seeks to share a painful emotional experience between the author and the reader.

31 Action occupies the centrality of Domenico Lenzi’s narrative. Nevertheless, in the narrative of the famine in Siena, we find another level of detail. Lenzi begins with the account of an exemplary action. During the food shortage, the minister of the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala began to effectuate large distributions of bread:

■ Anyone was given a loaf of 14 ounces [in weight], women and men,  
■ adults and children. [...] In the face of so much beneficent almsgiving,  
■ and of such great charity, a great number of poor people began to  
■ come, even from the most distant places. [...]

But, O Lord, the present Mirror, called Human, must tell of the great wickedness that has taken place. Overcome by greed, the government of Siena, with iniquity, began to oppose almsgiving. [...] O Siena, full of pride! The government determined that the hospital should cease almsgiving and the distribution of bread.

[...] The next day the poor went to the hospital, hoping to find the usual refreshment. [...] Instead, they found the doors closed, and someone said: "Go away from here, hungry beggars [...], because the lords of the city decided that you would die with your misery elsewhere [...]. Charity no longer exists here."

[...] And so the poor marched to the city palace [...]. In the crowd, some people were crying and saying: "Mercy!". Others were saying "Set the palace on fire!"; and others: "Kill them all!". The soldiers of the palace went down into the streets [...]. But when the poor realized that they would be met with clubs, they decided to fight, and the soldiers took refuge inside the palace.

Soon Siena's war captain, Guido Ricci da Reggio, arrived with reinforcements; but a servant, with a piece of wood, without fearing for his life, struck this Guido; and if the weapon had been better, the captain would have died. [...]

Oh! Callous earth, why didn't you open up? [Days later] the government decreed that all poor foreigners must leave the city. The troops roamed the streets with sticks and stones, driving out the poor, not caring if they were adults or children, man or woman, pregnant woman or not. Many, thus expelled, came to Florence, a living source of mercy [...], and were well received [...]; and so they gave thanks to God. [The original quotation from Domenico Lenzi can be found in the Appendix]

- 32 In this section Lenzi uses another resource to build emotionality: the vocative. Again, direct speech is not attributed to any particular person and remains anonymous; it is, in Lenzi's representation, the crowd that speaks, through a style that seeks to arouse emotions in the interlocutor (for an analysis of anonymous shouts within urban rebellions, in the Languedoc, see Challet 2005).

- 33 Unlike the narrative about Barletta, here the narrator vehemently expresses his judgments about the supposed events that took place in Siena. Lenzi's discourse operates on three different instances: human action in a situation of social crisis; a hierarchy of values; and the relationship between behavior and a divine entity.
- 34 In the sphere of human action, there is a symmetrical opposition between the hospital minister and the rulers of Siena. The first organizes a general reception for the population in need (for hospitals in Medieval Tuscany, see Pinto 2008). The distribution of loaves is done without concern about calculations of the management of the scarcity. Instead, the councilors of the Government of Nine (Bowsky 1981) forbade distribution, estimating that the city would not have enough to feed all the hungry. Similar to what happened in Barletta, the people marched to the city palace. Then a moment of indecision seems to occur. A part of the group tried to move the council through negotiation, pleading mercy, and, with that, triggering emotional reactions in the rulers: empathy with the suffering population and pity for those in need. Another part of the group, however, claimed immediate action, forcing the rulers, for fear of retaliation, to revoke. The government's action, however, was inflexible, and the soldiers were sent to strike the crowd. But, instead of a people dominated by fear, as described by Leonardo Bruni, the group, although unarmed, faced the troops.
- 35 Lenzi describes that the group of people willing to negotiate cried out for "mercy". The notion of mercy was part of a broad set of values and ethical principles, organized into two broad categories: virtues and sins. We have reason to think that this ethical cognition, organized into these two categories, formed a kind of foundation of medieval intangible culture (Newhauser 2005; Casagrande and Vecchio, 2003, p. 9). Zanetti Domingues wrote that "the connection between emotions, virtues, and vices in the Western tradition has been shown to be important since classical times" (Zanetti Domingues 2021, p. 66). Domenico Lenzi's discourse, that is, his evaluation of events and the emotionality of his text, operates on these ethical categories. In characterizing the actions of the Sienese government, the narrator uses the terms "cruelty", "iniquity", "impiety", "greed", and "pride" (*chrudele, nequitie, impietà, invidio, insuperbita*).

- 36 These are not designations of the same tenor. Cruelty, iniquity, and impiety are adjectives that describe actions based on two negative ethical principles: greed and pride. Lenzi seems informed about the theory of the hierarchy of sins; *pride* was considered the worst sin because it denoted an action done directly against God (Newhauser 2005).
- 37 Here, we arrive at the third instance of Domenico Lenzi's discursive construction: the relationship between human behavior and divinity. In defining the alms made by the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, the narrator writes that the cleric operated on the principle of *charity* (*karità*) (for the history of the concept of *caritas* in ecclesiastical thought, see Todeschini 2017). In the ethical hierarchy, charity occupies a place symmetrically opposed to that of pride and signifies an action of love towards God.
- 38 Lenzi's text shows us that a famine situation was quite complex. First, productivity declines, often caused by climatic variations, resulting in a decrease in available food, occurred within a society marked by economic and social inequality. Thus, the elites had the potential to keep in their granary the scarce food available. The population, faced with the impossibility of accessing food, was led to act, but this action took place within a system of values that placed emotions at the forefront of different types of behavior.
- 39 The government's actions were characterized as "cruelty", "impiety", and "iniquity". Regardless, neither the author nor the popular group operated in terms of constructing a discourse of upheaval of social categories, questioning economic mechanisms or the government framework. Rather, the evaluation, based on ethical parameters constructed by the culture, engendered emotional reactions linked to the feeling of injustice in the face of actions interpreted as iniquitous. The emotional evaluation of injustice, rooted in the unequal appropriation of food stocks, led popular groups in Barletta and Siena to accomplish a political contestation. Lenzi describes, without reproval, a humble domestic work striking the war captain Guido da Reggio. This means someone deprived of political representation attacking a central political figure; this represents a poor hitting an aristocratic character. This would be the world turned upside down, but it is not represented that way by the narrator.



## Charity, subjectivity, and political action

40 The centrality of emotions in *Specchio Umano* can be thought of as a way of understanding reality and also as a narrative resource. It is the work of another author, a contemporary of Lenzi, that allows us to reflect better on these two points. Domenico Cavalca also dedicated a text to reflect on ethics: the *Specchio dei Peccati* (*The Mirror of Sins*).

41 In the prologue, Cavalca (1838) exposes the difficulties of reflecting on the types of sin committed by man. In addition to being shameful to describe certain sinful genres, the main problem lies in the uniqueness of the cases. According to the friar,

Sì perchè troppo sarebbe prolissa opera a scrivere ogni peccato che fare si può, e sì massimamente perchè ogni uomo non pecca parimente (Cavalca 1838, p. 27).

It would be interminable to write down every sin that can be committed because each man does not sin like the other.

42 Cavalca recognizes the singleness of human behavior and the problem of proceeding with generalizations. To overcome the issue, he acted by constructing analytical categories. More specifically, the friar constructs a matrix with two typologies: four *forms* of sins and three *instances* of behaviors. In the first typology, the author describes:

1. To sin with the “heart”, that is, with the thought, the will, the intention, and/or the desire,
2. To sin with the tongue, that is, with the uses of speech and with the construction of discourse,
3. To sin by deed,
4. Sins by negligence, that is, by inaction and omission.

43 Here, we will not perform a genealogy of Cavalca’s text, seeking to understand the origin of his ideas and the authors who influenced the friar. Rather, I would like to focus on two elements. The first

element works with the impossibility of realizing an analysis of human action that establishes dichotomies between emotion and reason; between subjectivity and behavior. At this point, Cavalca's theoretical construction is closer to the theories about emotions of contemporary psychology. Secondly, for Cavalca, singularity is a central attribute of behavior, resulting in a diversity that surpasses any possibility of enumeration; it is constructed by intention, desire, and thought; it occurs in the instance of symbolic uses, of verbal and written expression; and it manifests itself continually in the dialectics of things we do and things we don't do, of the constant play of action and inaction.

- 44 Cavalca's treatise goes beyond the construction of a theory of ethics, based, as usual, on virtues and sins, and takes the form of an attempt to understand behavior. He establishes a guide for the evaluation of the multiplicity of human action, aiming to separate the exemplary, object of praise, from the erroneous, object of rebuke, confession, and penitence. Indeed, we find, at this point, an absolute difference between the theories of contemporary psychology and Cavalca's text. In the contemporary sciences, understanding and evaluating are dissociated actions of thinking. In the Friar's treatise, constructed according to his pastoral intentions, understanding and evaluation (positive or negative) are thoroughly inseparable.
- 45 Domenico Lenzi, in his manuscript, works in analogous terms. The wheat merchant tries to understand-evaluate the actions narrated within his ethical meanings; and places emotions as central to the fabrication of human history. Despite the belief that ethical parameters are eternal and universal, individuality makes human action in history unpredictable, resulting in surprising events for the wheat merchant himself, such as the decision, made in a closed council of government, to prohibit alms made by a hospital; or the physical attack, made by a humble and unarmed man, devoid of any military training, against an aristocrat and captain of war of a central republic of Tuscany.
- 46 This perspective allows us to think again about Lenzi's text. We mentioned above that *Specchio Umano* is not only built with emotionally charged expressions but seeks to arouse emotions in the reader, together with evaluations of approval and disapproval. Here, as we

have already reflected, emotions are not distinguished from evaluation and judgment about the events described. But there's more. As we saw in Cavalca's treatise, the use of language was understood as a genre of behavior. This allows us to understand that *Specchio Umano* did not place himself as a mere witness. The production of the manuscript was an *action* of the merchant, to be inscribed in the plan of events of his period. It was not for nothing that Lenzi spent a great deal of his private money to request that one of the illumination workshops in Florence produce paintings to be included in the manuscript; in fact, the images of the *Libro del Biadaio* are well-known objects in the history of art dedicated to the medieval era (Rouchon Mouilleron 2008; Barbero and Frugoni 1999). The use of what we might now call emotional "stylistic resources" derived from Lenzi's intention to act in history through the uses of language, and from a conception of behavior that recognized emotions as decisive for any human action.

- 47 *Charity*, as an ethical principle, is important for all texts investigated in this article. In Cavalca, charity has a clear and simple meaning: love for God. However, the object of the friar's study is not ethical principles, but the understanding-evaluation of human action. And here "charity" acquires a more complex meaning. It is in the debate on the practices of almsgiving, as donations addressed to the poor, that the reflection on charity emerges in the *Specchio dei Peccati*. The friar says that

Ecco che la limosina chiama debito, perciocchè per debito di carità si siamo tenuti di sovvenire l'uno all'altro, come fratelli; se no per certo sappiamo che cosi mala parte farà Iddio a noi de' beni del cielo, come noi facciamo alli nostri prossimi de' beni della terra (Cavalca 1838, p. 47).

Alms are also a debt, because, by the debt of charity, we are impelled to support one another as brothers and sisters; for we know that God will not share with us the goods of heaven unless we share our goods on earth with our neighbor.

- 48 In Cavalca, charity is love for God, but it is manifested, as human action, by the fraternity with which we share our goods on earth, "one supporting another". We find, therefore, the tradition of thought

identified by Giacomo Todeschini, in which the idea of this virtue represents a point of contact between economic reflection, in terms of access to “goods”, and the ideal of a Christian society built through the union of believers:

les terminologies de l'évaluation économique, autrement dit celles de la quantification du bien public, étaient profondément enracinées dans les lexiques de la *caritas* en tant qu'« affection », « amour », ou « amitié » capable de maintenir la société des fidèles dans l'union et la concorde (Todeschini 2017, p. 262-263).

The terminologies of economic evaluation, that is, those of the assessment of the public good, were deeply rooted in the lexicons of *caritas*, with meanings of “affection”, “love”, or “friendship”, values that sought to maintain the society of the faithful in union and harmony.

- 49 Lenzi's discourse is parallel with Domenico Cavalca's theories. The ethical principle of charity emerges from a duality of meaning (love of God and fraternal action). Moreover, we can say that this principle is the very foundation of Domenico Lenzi's *Specchio Umano*. Charity is both subjectivity, in terms of love for God, and the behavior of sharing food, in a social dynamic marked by inequality. That is why, for Lenzi, the rupture of almsgiving by the government of Siena is inconceivable: it means a rupture with the principle of love for God.
- 50 It is interesting to note that the performance of the minister of the hospital, described by Domenico Lenzi, is perfectly analogous with what was advocated by Friar Domenico Cavalca. The friar of Siena seems to orient his action in exactly the same terms as the concept of charity conceived by Cavalca, and uses the resources of the hospital to organize large free distributions of bread to anyone who needs it.
- 51 However, the action of charity in *Specchio Umano* seems to go beyond the sense of almsgiving. Without rejecting the virtue of alms and their ability to expand food access, the merchant emphasized the importance of maintaining commercial circulation in times of crisis. This is the central argument in Lenzi's description of the crisis in Barletta. When referring to Tuscany, the narrator-merchant does not proceed differently. Domenico Lenzi describes that in May 1329, amid

the crisis, a single landowner made his considerable sums of wheat available to the merchants of Figline Valdarno (a rural area of Florence), causing a deflationary process for a few days. The landowner made his private stocks available, selling at a lower price than that charged by the market during the dearth (Lenzi 1978, p. 309). It is an action that operates on the level of charity, in the same way as that operated by the friar of hospital Santa Maria della Scala. In the merchant's discourse, the charity also referred to the maintenance of different mechanisms of food access. The principle of charity states that the owners of granaries should not close their stocks and that the commercial circulation of wheat must be protected to maintain food access for the population (for the market participating in the Christian *civitas*, see Todeschini 2004).

## Conclusion

52 In conclusion, let's mention one last excerpt from Lenzi's text, referring to April 29, 1329, which took place in the grain market square of Orsanmichele, in Florence:

And in a few hours, all the grain was sold, and many could not buy and remained in the square. On that day, there were many people from the city [...]. They were screaming a lot, and it was possible to hear a lot of wailing. Some said: "Ah, badly governed city, where we can't get food! We should go to the house of these robbers, and set fire to everything, for they are leaving us in this hunger!" And so they said to each other, and many people refused to leave.

Faced with this lament and these cruel murmurs that the buyers made, the officers of the Republic (who controlled the square) were moved by pity. They immediately decided to give the stored grain, one *stajo* per person, so that the people could be comforted. [All original quotations from Domenico Lenzi can be found in the Appendix]

53 At that moment of the crisis, the officials of the Republic had chosen to sell small portions of the public stock of wheat, on a daily basis. On April 29, the entire quantity was sold quickly. Several purchasers had succeeded in acquiring and had withdrawn. Nonetheless, no less important quantity of buyers remained in the square. A scathing criti-

cism emerged, and the idea that the city was being badly governed began to spread. Angry buyers began to *accuse* that not having access to food was tantamount to robbery. Those who held private stocks, or held back public stocks, were *robbing* buyers of access to wheat. This is a very singular proposition, quite different from the perspectives of Leonardo Bruni and Domenico Cavalca. All the speech of accusation and discontentment is emotionally charged, but it is, at the same time, an assessment of the situation effectuated through cultural principles (chiefly the concept of charity), and it is, no less, a call to action – in the manner advocated by the theory of apprehension. It is an unexpected expression, a meaning created within subjectivity and which, through communication, was socialized and was able to integrate a shared experience in a specific situation. I believe that the idea that they were being robbed was the emotional form given to the principle of charity, by these people who, on April 29, 1329, in Florence, were trying to buy something to eat, and were suffering from food scarcity and the sense of injustice.

- 54 The point of view constructed through the analysis allows us to think about emotions as a complex process, which links the subjective interpretation of reality with choices of action in the arena of the public square. A universal biological mechanism, emotions are observed from an integrally cultural perspective, in direct relation to historical moral values and historical symbolic principles. More than that, emotions are understood as central to the functioning of cognitive processes, interfering in the elaboration of discourses and ethical reflections on the meanings of life and the world.
- 55 We can visualize contradictory emotional regimes by observing different lexical uses and textual styles. In Leonardo Bruni, the lexicon is used concisely, with degrees of intensity; social categories are defined by different emotions. In Domenico Lenzi, the lexicon emerges from repetitions and cumulation of adjectives or nouns. However, the emotional regime occurs beyond the lexicon and works in the style, through stylistic resources such as direct speech or the vocative.
- 56 Both cases are linked to a conflict of material economic reality: the struggle for access to food after an intense drop in agricultural production (for a hunger crisis as an access crisis, Sen 1982).

Leonardo Bruni defends the idea that the actions practiced by the aristocracy were fundamental for feeding the people in a period of famine. Domenico Lenzi seeks to express the drama caused by a hunger crisis, showing the collision between different interests and hostilities in the public square. His lexical use of emotions coincides with an ethical rationale and with the judgments about contradictory actions in the interior of the city. Correct or not, I believe that this line of inspection allows us to consider that working on the history of emotions can also lead us to the heart of social or economic history.

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## APPENDIX

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### **Domenico Lenzi, *Sppechio Umano*.**

Original published in LENZI Domenico, 1978, *Il libro del Biadaio* (ed. Pinto), Firenze.

#### **I. Famine and revolt in Bartela (1329)**

Alla città di Barleta adivenne, per lo fatto del caro, che non si trovava grano né pane per la città, ché pocho ve n'avea, e quello che v'era si era di grandi huomini della terra, ke l'aveano nascoto in certe fosse sotterra. E la gente minuta era a grande stretta [...] e andavansi ramarichando e dolendo fortemente che morivano di fame [...].

Alquanti gentili e poveri huomini, udendo costoro che si ramarichavano e dolevansi sì fortemente, sì ne inchrebbe loro. Allora si levarono con una brighata d'uomini quasi presso nel torno di xxv, e andarono celatamente [...] e tolsono il gonfalone del re, e uscirono fuori e andarono per la città, chi armato e chi disarmato, gridando: 'Muoia chi à grano e viva messere lo re!'. [...] I grandi huomini, quando vidono il popolo della città che andavano gridando a sì fatto modo, ebbono paura d'esser morti (..).

In questo fatto si levarono alquanti cittadini grandi e possenti di quella città, e mandarono per lo giustiziere de' rre celatamente; ed elli vene incontante. E venuto, allora presono consilio insieme come il popolo si facesse rachetare. A questo fatto providono di fare cerchare chi avesse del grano, sì

llo dovesse trarre fuori. E incontante andò il bando da parte di messere lo re e del suo giustiziere [...]. E in questo modo fue rachettato la città. Il secondo die che questo fue rasegnato, e trovato assai grano [...], e chi ne voleva sì ne poteva avere dando i danari. (Lenzi 1978, p. 339-340)

## II. The banishment of the poor in Siena (1329)

A tutti era per ciaschuno uno pane di xiiij once dato, e femine e huomini, piccoli e grandi; e se era donna gravida, doppiamente proveduta era di due pani. A tanta e sì famosa limosina e karità correva il povero, fosse lungi quanto potesse; e così non menomava la limosina per crescere di poveri.

[...] Ma, o signori, correte allo presente 'Specchio' intitolato 'umano', raccontare di sì fatta inpietà [...]. In invidio caduto, a quello comune di Siena colle sue nequitie pazzescamente se oppuose com coperte condizioni. [...] O insuperbita Siena [...], comandarono che a pena del fuoco tanta limosina da quinciinanzi al postutto si rimangha senza più farsi.

[...] Tornavano adunque come i' llo loro rifuggio i poveri lo sequente dì a quello spedale [...]. Ma volto il dolce chiamare in isventurato accomiatore, così disse: 'Andate affamati e mendiche a perire insiememente colle vostre necessità, ché da' signori di qui n'è comandato lasciarvi perire nelle vostre miserie'.

A ttanta chrudele e chiocciante risposta s'udiron infinite boci e percosse di mani, urli e piani e graffiari di visi[...]. E così correndo [...] quelli poveri [...] al maggiore palazzo, dove quelli comandamenti dinanzi erano fatti, giugiendo gridavano: 'Misericordia!'; chi 'al fuocho!'; chi 'Muoia!'. [...] E uscendo fanti armati fuori del palazzo, che a quello romore de' poveri contrastesse, pocho valse; ma rivolto i poveri lo 'ntendimento degli armati usciti del dire in aoperare, com sassi e com mazze percotendo, conbatterono quello palazzo, rinchacciando dentro forse com paure di maggiore loro danno.

A questo romore corse sforzatamente Guido Ricci da Reggio, capitano di guerra d'essa città, a chui, di morte non curando, s'acostò um fante con una stangha e sulle reni un colpo com quella al detto Guido crosciò, sì che l'armi buone ke 'ndosso avea, a pena della morte il camparono. [...]

[...] e furonne presi una notte in sulle letta loro bem lx huomini, e di questi ne furo collati tanti che ne furono inpicchati per la gola x [...]; e tale fu tra gl'inpicchati che forse mai di quello romore non n'avea udite le novelle.

A! dur terra, perché non t'apristi? A la quale cosa grido di tromba uscì e seguì humana boce, dicendo ch'a pena della persona ogni povero forestieri debbia sgombrare la città da ivi al terzo dì. Et andavano tutte le familie con bastoni e con pietre duramente percotendoli e cacciandoli fuori della porta, non guardando piccolo o grande, femina o maschio, gravida o non gravida. I quali così chacciati, a Firenze, come loro fine e indubbioso rimedio e fonte viva di misericordia, ricorsono, ove furono bene ricevuti e fatto a lloro assai bene; e elli a dDio reddendo grazie". (Lenzi 1978, p. 318-322)

### **III. Conflict in the public square of Florence in the famine of 1329**

Etcoti in poca d'ora venduto il grano, e coloro ch'erano rimasi, che non n'aveano avuto, erano grandissima gente dell città [...], e facevano grande pianto e molto si ramaricavano, et diceano 'Ecco città mal guidata, ké non possiamo avere del grano! E si vorrebbe andare alle chase di questi ladroni che n'anno, e mettervi fuoco e ardeglivi entro perchè e' ci tenghono in questa fame'. E chi diceva una e chi un'altra, et in questo modo stava la gente e non si sapeano partire. A questo lamento e mormorio grandissimo e chrudele che i comperatori facevano, li detti uficiali per lo comune si mossono a pietà. Inmantenente feciono dare del grano mescolato a l'usato modo, uno staio per persona per mandalliene consolati. E fue questa arota moggia xxv. (Lenzi 1978, p. 302-303)

## **ABSTRACTS**

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### **English**

Emotions are a central component of human action and, therefore, of individual or collective agency in the process of historical transformation. In this article, I discuss the concept of emotion constructed by contemporary psychology, based on the framework proposed by the theory of apprehension. I then reflect on how emotions participated both in the discursive construction and in the agency of men and women who lived in Late Medieval Italy. My goal is to make visible how ethical principles were decisive for the outcome of different feelings about dearth events, resulting in different emotional experiences, discourses, and actions in the public space.

## Français

Les émotions sont une composante centrale de l'action humaine et, par conséquent, de l'action individuelle ou collective dans le processus de transformation historique. Dans cet article, j'analyse le concept d'émotion construit par la psychologie contemporaine, en me basant sur le cadre proposé par la théorie de l'appréhension. À partir de là, je questionne la façon dont les émotions ont participé à la construction discursive et aux actions des hommes et des femmes qui ont vécu aux <sup>xiv</sup><sup>e</sup> et <sup>xv</sup><sup>e</sup> siècles, dans la péninsule italienne. Mon objectif est de rendre visible comment les principes éthiques ont été décisifs pour engendrer différents sentiments face aux événements de pénurie, résultant en différentes expériences émotionnelles, en différents discours et en différentes actions dans l'espace public.

## INDEX

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### Mots-clés

histoire des émotions, famine, révoltes populaires, éthique médiévale

### Keywords

history of emotions, famine, popular revolts, medieval ethics

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