



Women-Slaves and Servants in Renaissance Florence Their Stories and Their 'Heritage'

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Abstract

Thousands of infants were abandoned in Florence over a period of forty years in the middle of the 15th century. A large number of these 'gettatelli', as they were called in Tuscany, were children of female slaves, certainly mistreated by their masters. The archives of the Spedale degli Innocenti show a period (1445 - 1485) when the number of children of slaves made up 1/3 of the orphans found in the 'wheel' of the befotrofi. The foundation of the former hospital today has also made it possible to understand the number of female slaves who left their children and where they came from. Florentine scholars then studied the 'trade registers', highlighting the number of women bought and sold (Tognetti, 2002). 83.2% of the slaves brought to Florence at the end of the 14th century were Tartars, while the others included Greeks, Russians, Turks, Slavs, Caucasians, Albanians, Saracens and so on. In Florence, these women were purchased as 'luxury goods' and thus slavery/servitude was different from places crowded with slaves (such as the port of Genoa and Livorno). The research aims to tell some stories (some of which have already been fictionalised), to bring up-to-date data, but above all to attempt to find a common thread between the origin of the slaves half a millennium ago and - incredibly - those women who were 'subjected' to domestic and many times illegal labour in the city of Florence.

Keywords: Female Slavery, Florence, History of women, Orphans, Renaissance.