

NOTES & QUERIES

Some remarks on Germini in Bronzino's *Capitolo in lode della Zanzara*

From Nazario Renzoni

In 1988 F. Pratesi – “Tarot in Florence in the XVI Century: its diffusion from literary sources”, *The Playing-Card*, Vol XVI, No. 3, 78-83 – reported a reference on the Germini game and pack in the satirical poem *Capitolo in lode della Zanzara* (Chapter in Praise of the Mosquito) written by the painter Agnolo Allori, better known as Bronzino (1503-1572). Since Pratesi himself did “not exclude that an examination of the poem in greater detail may provide further information, since the meaning is often not very clear”, I think it could be useful to reconsider this text at the light of a long practice in playing Minchiate according to rules very similar to the ones described by Minucci in 1688 and then by manuscripts and printed manuals from the beginning of XVIII up to the first half of the XIX century.

Written allegedly between 1530 and 1535 the classic *terzine* of Dante, the *Capitolo* is composed of 268 verses and tries to persuade the reader that the unpleasant insect is actually a benefactor – the Benefactor! – of humanity, worthy of the highest respect and gratitude. Full of allusions (and many others are probably now lost), it is written in a fresh and colloquial language that, after 500 years, is still quite easily readable. The rather marginal reference to Germini is more or less in the mid of the work and is based on a consideration which the author assures us is not one of his

inventions (*Io non me l'ho trovato*) but one heard from many people:

Io non me l'ho trovato, anzi parlare

N'ho sentito a parecchi, che'l bel suono

Delle trombe insegnaron le Zanzare;

This hazardous hypothesis – the derivation of the trumpet blaring sound from the annoying dipteron buzz – is then followed by a tercet in general praise of mosquitoes (or maybe trumpets) and, finally, Bronzino introduces the Germini game:

Ponete mente il giorno delle feste,

Dove si gioca a Germini, ed allora

Vi fian le mie parole manifeste

L'Imperadore e 'l Papa che s'adora

Vi son per nulla e le virtù per poco

Fede e Speranza ed ogni altra lor suora

Il Zodiaco e 'l Mondo e 'l Sole e 'l Foco,

L'Aria e la Terra, ogni cosa si piglia

Con quelle trombe alla fine del giuoco.

La gente s'argomenta e s'assottiglia

Fino ad un certo che, poi s'abbandona,

Gli studi, ed ogni cosa si scompiglia.

Immediately after stating that Germini are played on feast days, Bronzino quickly enumerates many tarots – Imperatore and Papa (*che s'adora*: that is adored), the virtues, the zodiac signs, Mondo and Sole, three of the four elements – to finally affirm that the Trumpets (*le Trombe*) is the most important of all these cards. The tarot list is obviously incomplete and does not follow the canonical order; this is fully justified by the requirements of metric and by the fact that the text is neither a manual nor a scientific description of the game. It is interesting to know that in a later version of the