

PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON VIOLENCE FROM MASKED PEOPLE DURING CARNIVAL IN THE DUKEDOM OF ERCOLE I D'ESTE¹

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Abstract

During the carnival period, the Duke of Ferrara Hercules I of Este (1471-1505) often emanated decrees in which he forbade people in masks to hurt others (similar decrees were issued in many cities, such as Venice). He also forbade masked people from

carrying weapons and sticks (but only those that were larger than what the city statutes allowed for). The temptation to settle scores, however, was evidently too strong, because chronicles often report assaults, injuries, and even out and out ambushes.

1. According to chronicler Ugo Caleffini, during the carnival of 1482 a fact of exceptional gravity happened. A midwife was taken by force by three masked men who covered her face, preventing her from understanding the route. They took her into a house, and demanded that she help a masked woman give birth. As soon as the child was born, they forced her to baptize him, they then put him in a glowing fireplace and covered him with embers. Despite the fact that the infant possessed a very limited ability to move, the pain was such that on three occasions he escaped the embers. However, the masked men intended to burn him alive, so they placed him back in the embers with the fire irons. After this infanticide, they once again blindfold the midwife, and took her back home.² By the time the

1 An early version of this paper was presented at the VI annual SCIENTIAE conference held in Padua, April 19-22, 2017.

2 «In questo etiam tempo fu in Ferrara scoperto como a questi zorni proximi passati da carnevale, al tempo dela nocte, tri homini vestiti in mascara andorno ala casa de una dona nominata Brea che aleva li fioli, et quella chiamata zoxo ala porta, avoluporno et stropoglie gli ochi et sbatela a cavallo et condussela via in Ferrara, in una casa, in una camera tuta ornata da tapezarie dapertuto, per modo che la non sepe mai cognoscere ove la se fusse; et qua la sbindò et destropòli gli ochi, et feceli aiutare a nascere una creatura ad una femena che era li, mascarata. Et parturito che havé quella donna uno bello fiolo maschio, quelli tali tri mascarati, che continue stetano in quella camara a vedere parturire

woman got rid of her blindfold, the men had already disappeared. This heinous crime was recalled in a sermon in the church of S. Maria degli Angeli, but (to my knowledge) it remained unpunished. Despite having read numerous chronicles of the period, I – fortunately – have never again encountered a similar abyss of cruelty. I can therefore say that infanticide is not a practice that belongs to the late medieval Ferrara carnival, but was rather an exceptional event. But what were the practices that characterized late medieval carnival, and in particular that which took place in Ferrara during the rule of Duke Ercole I d'Este?

Carnival in Europe has inspired many studies, but I must report that medieval Italian Carnival is scarcely investigated.³ It has been studied mainly within the history of theater, and for a later period (from the sixteenth century onwards⁴). Very little is known about it until the late fifteenth century, and studies are lacking. Maybe studies are lacking because very little is known about it? It is like asking ourselves which came first: the chicken or the egg. Looking for information on carnival during the fifteenth century, I found works on performances and events celebrated at carnival, but I have read almost nothing that concerned the topic I want to deal with, that is, masked people. When did people start disguising themselves? What were the reasons and purposes? In my opinion, before addressing the specifics of masking during the carnival, we need to contextualize the origin and characteristics of this practice. Such a practice was associated with the period we now call 'carnival' only towards the end of the Middle Ages. As Bronzini states, «one of the riskiest historiographical notions [...] for the history of popular culture is that of long-lasting processes». He continues: «the correspondence of medieval freedom of the calends of January with the *Libertas Decembris*

quella tale femena, fecen per forza che la dicta commadre alevadrice lo baptizò, et quello baptizato, feceno da canto il focho et ge lo coprino, cussì vivo, soto le brasa et focho ardente per tre fiata, perché ogni fiata el saltava del focho suso il focolaro, et tandem lo represeno et tornolo nel focho et per forza gel tene cum ferri et altre arme carichato, che più non saltasse de fori, et tenegelo tanto ch'el fu brusato quel puto. Quo facto, preseno la dicta Brea et evolupoglie li ochi et condussela in casa sua et partisseno, che la non ne cognosete alchuno et nì ove la fusse stata» Cazzola 2006, pp. 346-347.

3 It is impossible not to cite a milestone of historiography such Burke 1978, the essential work by Le Roy Ladurie 1979 and, although it regards the “carnavalesque” as an anthropological dimension, Bakhtin 1968.

4 Pola Falletti-Villafalletto 1938-1943; Gleijeses 1978; Calore 1982; Burke 1982; Chiabogoglio 1990; Ventrone 1992; Cascetta-Carpani 1995; Ciappelli 1997; Ventrone 2016.

mentioned by Horace (Sat. VII 4-5) is recognized and accepted by the Church [...], but in fact between them there is a difference of name, date, motivation and ideology».⁵

Commenting on the first known witnesses about Rome, Brugnoli notes:

Come è noto, gli unici preziosi documenti su ludi pubblici medievali comportanti un travestimento da maschera sono costituiti da un accenno alla festa della *Cornomannia* contenuto nel prologo composto da Giovanni Imonide per il suo rifacimento della *Cena Cipriani* e dalla relazione complessiva su tutti i ludi delle festività principali dell'*Ordo Romanus* contenuta nel *Liber Polypticus* di Benedetto canonico di S. Pietro in Vaticano composto fra il 1140 e il 1143 come *liber camerarius* alla sede apostolica, dove compare, fra l'altro, per la prima volta la citazione del Carnevale con questo nome (*Ludus Carnevalarii*).⁶

In Venice, it seems that the first prohibitions against disguising one's face with 'Greek style' beards or other hairpieces dates to the twelfth century.⁷ The chronicler Salimbene de Adam, blaming the bad behavior of Reggio's citizens, tell us that in 1287 they did not disguise themselves during carnival, but in lent, and for that they were even more to be condemned.

[1287] In quadragesima majori non institerunt Regini operibus pietatis [...]. Acceperunt enim a dominabus mutuo vestes muliebres plures eorum, quibus induti, coeperunt ludere, et per civitatem cum hastiludio discurrebant; et, ut mulieres melius apparerent, cum cerusa dealbabant larvas, quas suis vultibus apponebant, non attendentes poenam quae talibus est promissa.⁸

This detail seems to indicate that in late 13th-century Reggio citizens already practiced disguise, and that it was more tolerated during the carnival period.

5 Bronzini 1990, pp. 69-70.

6 Brugnoli 1990, p. 47.

7 Pavan 1981, p. 354.

8 Scalia 1966, p. 913.

2. Both because the state of research does not allow it, both for space reasons, I cannot give here a sufficiently broad context to the information that I obtained from Ferrara's sources. I mainly refer to three Chronicles, which are very important sources for understanding the phenomenon. All of them were written by lawyers, respectively Ugo Caleffini (1471-1494), Girolamo Ferrarini (1476-1489) and Bartolomeo Zambotti (1476-1504), and they are, at some extent, synoptic witnesses. Caleffini, born about 1439, was a mature man when Ercole d'Este became duke. Ferrarini, on the other hand, was born in 1457, and Zambotti was the same age. Ferrarini and Zambotti not only write of the carnival: they declare that they go masked, and on occasion even went together.

Ferrarini writes that February 3, 1478, the banker Rigo from San Vitale was attacked by a man in a mask with a bladed weapon.⁹ The same day, two masked men beat Francesco Biondo and stole his mantle.¹⁰ In 1480 a jewish money lender is attacked by a law student.¹¹ In 1481 a masked man clubs Folco d'Este, grandson of the Duke.¹² In 1482 someone stabbed a woman.¹³ After the war with Venice, during which masquerades were sometimes forbidden, sometimes limited for safety reasons, on February 17, 1487, a masked man sticks a knife into the body of Andrea Bondinari, in the market square.¹⁴ On February 20 people in masks nearly kill Rinaldo Sacрати. During the same night four masked individuals sneak into the home of Giovanni from Scandiano, they strip off their masks, steal 108 gold ducats from him, and threaten him with death if he denounced them.¹⁵ On March 1st, a group of masked men tries to access the warehouse of tissues of Ludovico Marani in order to rob him, but fails in the enterprise.¹⁶ The list of violence could go on and on but I will stop here because I believe that by now you have got the idea. Given all these testimonies it is spontaneous to ask questions, such as: did the episodes of violence increase during carnival,² Who were the

9 Griguolo 2006, p. 76.

10 Therein, p. 77.

11 Therein, p. 108.

12 Therein, p. 121.

13 Therein, p. 136.

14 Pardi 1937, p. 689.

15 Therein, p. 690.

16 Therein, p. 691.

victims and who the aggressors? To the first question, I reply that I think yes, the violence took place with a high concentration, by virtue of the impunity that the mask gave the wearer, making him unrecognizable. To the second question, there is no easy answer.

I think that it would be a mistake to assimilate the assaults described by Caleffini, Ferrarini and Zambotti during the carnival to ritual violence such as looting that took place on occasions like the birth of a ruler's heir, a ruler's wedding, or during the "sede vacante", in Rome,¹⁷ or even, to the ritual violence perpetrated by young males against corpses of the convicted (documented previously in late 15th-century Florence).¹⁸ The injuries described by the sources were mainly individual, not committed by groups, and often seem to be planned. Yet, if on the one hand, the carnival appears to be a moment of reversal of the rules, the Ferrara chronicles tell us that punishments for those who did not respect the rules were strict. The student who killed the Jew was hanged, as was the woman's assailant. It seems, then, that a limit could not be overcome, and this limit corresponded to the laws in force throughout the year. In what consisted, then, evasion connected to carnival, for those who did not practice violence, if the only details that the chroniclers provide are that 1) anyone who wanted could go masked, and 2) some masked people performed violent acts?

3. Let us give a more in-depth look at the elements the chroniclers give us. Ferrarini reports the day when the Duke granted his subjects the permission to go masked. This is the phrase he uses for 1477: «On Monday, January 6, the day of Epiphany, our Duke gave license to everyone in his city that they could go masked, and so this day the masks began to go around the land».¹⁹ The Duke repeated the formula every year, almost

17 Even recently, some studies have shed light on the phenomenon of 'sede vacante': Paravicini Bagliani 1994; Rehberg 2010. After the contribution of Ginzburg 1987 on ritual lootings, both in a micro and a more general historical perspective, the phenomenon still remains in large part to be investigated. Staying in Ferrara, in addition to the hasty outlines by Ricci 1998, 79-84, for example, no study has been dedicated to deepen the *battagliola* ('battle') that every July 22 was held by children to commemorate the uprising against the Catalan mercenaries to whom the Pope had entrusted the government of the city (1317), which was prohibited by Duke Alfonso only in 1537.

18 Zorzi 1993; Niccoli 1994; Ead. 1995.

19 «A dì luni 6 zenaro, el dì dela Epifania, el duca nostro dete licentia a tuti quelli dela sua cità che potesseno andare in mascara, et così questo dì cominzono andare la mascare per la terra».

always on Epiphany; and the carnival ends with the beginning of Lent. Hercules was a ruler very attentive to his image, which he promoted in many ways. He established new costumes, in order to play out completely new forms of relation with his subjects. For example I cite the “ventura”, that consisted in a house by house visit that Hercules made to his wealthy subjects, to obtain in-kind donations (a custom that he established in 1473), or the washing of the feet of the poor (100 and more poor people having been washed), on Holy Thursday (a custom that he established in 1476). We can assume that it was Hercules to establish the custom to allow going masked, but for confirmation we would have to retrace the laws and decrees issued by Hercules’ predecessors.

If this was the case, it would confirm a rather recent trend: the Renaissance rulers expressed new paradigms for promoting themselves. During the late middle ages, sources seem not to be interested in the carnival. They begin to pay attention to the phenomenon after the mid fifteenth century, during the lordship of rulers such as Lorenzo il Magnifico, or pope Paul II, or Hercules I d’Este. Yet, it is not easy to state if chroniclers were more attentive because of a new sensibility regarding this aspect of life, or as a consequence of the efforts made by their rulers. In late 14th- and early 15th-century Bologna, for example, during carnival chronicles mostly describe jousts performed in the city square. I found notice of a tournament on 1392, February 27, to which 80 fighters attended (40 Italians, 40 Germans). Other jousts are described for the years 1407, 1443, 1444.²⁰ Giovanni Bentivoglio organized public games during Carnival at least since late 1482 (the chronicler Ghirardacci very eloquently noted that the joust of 1443 was organized by the millers, that of 1444 by the city senate, and the games of 1482 by “sir Giovanni”). In Rome, as we noticed above, the *Ludus carnevarii*, celebrated the first Sunday of Lent, is attested since 1140-1143.²¹

20 Respectively in: Ricci 1885, p. 31; Frati-Sorbelli 1902, p. 96; Sorbelli 1915-1932, pp. 75, 97. Jousts were a typical medieval and Renaissance practice, and thus they took place during the whole year. For example, despite taking place during Carnival, the joust that happened in Milan on February 26, 1451, was specifically held to celebrate the anniversary of the proclamation of Francesco Sforza as Duke of the city: the jousts were described on occasion of the proclamation of another such event, on 26 of February of the following year: Morbio 1846, p. 345. Maybe one or more of the jousts described during February in Bologna were organized due to other reasons than to celebrate carnival.

21 Boiteux 1982, p. 34.

According to Infessura, on his first year of pontificate, pope Paul II established a completely new schedule for the carnival «wanting to do something pleasing to the Romans».²² The Medici's case, in Florence, is perhaps the most studied.²³

4. However, if the Duke of Ferrara formally allowed his subjects to go masked, there was a reason. The ancient Statutes of Ferrara, dated 1287, do not treat the problem of masks. This is perhaps a clue that the phenomenon did not yet exist in Ferrara, or was still irrelevant. The two fifteenth century Statutes forbade circulating masked, because of the dangers caused by “lasciviousness” and “dishonesty”.²⁴ No distinction is made between day and night, or between city and countryside: anyone who is found concealing his face with a mask incurs the penalty of 28 liras. Those who just want to wear a mask can do so only in their home. We must recall, however, that the Statutes do not mention the period of Carnival. Let me now open a parenthesis on masks outside of Ferrara. Many fifteenth century statutes are not published, so my research was random. The Statutes of Trieste (1421), of Bologna (1454), and Viterbo (1469) do not deal with masks. In the sumptuary laws enacted by the city of Genoa in 1449, masks are cited, but only as part of festivities for weddings, as one of the possible ways to entertain guests. This form of

22 «Lo ditto papa Paulo in principio del suo papato volendo fare cosa grata alli Romani se ne venne ad habitare ad Santo Marco, et ampliò la festa dello carnelevare, et fece che lo lunedì dinanzi alo carnelevare se coresse per li garzoni un palio, et lo martedì per li iudei se corresse l'altro; lo mercoledì quello delli vecchi; lo iovedì se giva ad Nagoni; lo venerdì si stava in casa; lo sabbato alla caccia; la domenica se ricorrevano li tre palii consueti; lo lunedì correvono li buffali et lo martedì li asini; et di queste cose lui si pigliava piacere» Tommasini 1890, p. 69.

23 A rich bibliography is found in Ventrone 2016.

24 «Multis periculis lasciviis et inhonestatibus que ut plurimum contingere solent ex larvis sive mascaris providere et obviare volentes providemus quod aliquis non audeat velpresumat cuiuscumque conditionis existat ne extra domos suas vel alienas de die vel de nocte per civitatem vel burgos aut comitatum Ferrariae cum larvis sive mascaris ad faciem sive cum multa aut facie cooperta. Et si quis contrafecerit condemnetur pro qualibet vice comuni Ferrariae in libris XXVIII. Et si accusator aderit lucretur medietatem et quilibet de populo possit accusare et denunciare et tenebitur in secreto si voluerit, dummodo probet per duostestes id quod denuntiaverit et accusaret»: *Statuta civitatis Ferrariae 1456*, lib. III, art. 336 (Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea, Ferrara, MS Classe I, n° 729). Also the Statutes of Comacchio of 1490 foresaw a fine (10 lire marchesane): *Statuta Comacclii 1490*, art. 112, in Caputo-Caputo 1991, p. 80.

entertainment was considered dangerous, and as such prosecutable.²⁵ It is noteworthy that the Franciscan Andrea da Faenza, promoter between Lombardy and Umbria of ‘monti Frumentari’, in 1492 proposed to the community of Parma to add the prohibition of going masked to the municipal laws; this suggests that at the time such a prohibition was not yet in force.²⁶ Not even Andrea da Faenza, however, cites the carnival. That going masked during carnival constituted a cover to carry out criminal actions for some, and not only in Ferrara, is recounted by the Chronicles. I will just quote two cases, one from Bologna and one from Milan, both dating to 1480:

In principio dicti mensis februarii occisus fuit et obruncatus a mascharis in civitate Bononie unus ex sedecim rectoribus civitatis.²⁷

Die vigesimo novembris [1480] cum larvati nocte dieque ferent, non verentes cridas gubernatoris et maxima iminerent pericula, prout evenit anno presenti tempore carnisprivij, in quo occisus fuit milles domini potestatis per larvatos, facte sunt proclamationes in executione litterarum ducalium, quod sub pena indignationis ducallis nullus se faciat larvatum usque ad festum Sancti Antonij de mense januarii anni proxime future [= 1481, January 17], nec postea sine specialia licentia ducalli. Et utinam hoc observetur.²⁸

25 «Item cognoscentes mala et plura et graviora committi in tenebris quam a cognitis, sanxerunt ac decreverunt quod ne quaquam post hac liceat incognito vultu incedere vel larvatum, aut ut vulgus loquitur mimatum, ubi visi nveniri, sub pena florenorum decem a quolibet sic invento irremissibiliter exigenda, et totidem a tibicina seu citaredo seu quovis alio musico cum eis deprehenso. Et quoniam non minor videtur eius esse culpa qui hos et eiusmodi domi recipiat quam eorum qui receperunt, decreverunt quod in quacumque domo hi larvati seu mimi fuerint inventi, dominus e diu incidisse intelligatur penam florenorum viginti totiens ab eo sine miseratione exigenda quotiens hi iuvenes sic operti domum eius intraverint»: Archivio di Stato di Genova, Archivio Segreto, reg. Diversorum Jacobi de Bracellis X. 978, ann. 1449.

26 «Nullus sit cuius vis status, gradus et condicionis qui se mascharis vestiat, et ut vulgo dicitur se mascharum, seu larvatum faciat, cum sit quod multum detestandum et ex eo multa mala eveniant»: Archivio di Stato di Parma, Ordinationes ill.me communitatis Parmae, Comune, 44 (1491-1498), c. 87.

27 Bonazzi 1904, p. 65.

28 Therein, p. 83.

But who circulated masked? The reports that we find in Ferrara's chronicles are extremely eloquent: on January 1, 1478 Zambotti notes: «you began to go around this city masked, with our illustrious Duke's license, for *youthful pleasure*».²⁹ Indeed, it seems that they were young people, and especially students, to appreciate going around in mask. He uses a similar sentence the following year: «for the recreation of the youth» (1479, 6 January),³⁰ in 1480 (6 January): «to give pleasure to the young»,³¹ and in 1486 (10 January): «today the youth of Ferrara began to go masked with our illustrious Duke's license».³² Along with young people, however, those who circulated masked had to be wealthy because the masks and cloaks were expensive: Ferrarini, for example, in 1480 had borrowed clothes and masks from the jurist Ugolino da Bonfranceschi; and going masked in 1482 he tore – he did not explain how – the sleeves of an expensive shirt.³³ Whereas many people owned a single outfit that had to suffice for years, the information is indicative in itself. In addition to university students, those who circulated in masks were the nobles and the powerful: in 1486, Duke Ercole begins the carnival on December 10, almost a month earlier than usual, in order to allow the Marquis of Mantua (who had come to visit him) the pleasure of going in mask. In that same year, according to Caleffini, the Duke walked around in a mask every day. In January 1488, Hannibal Bentivoglio went to Ferrara specifically to circulate in a mask. On February 4 of the same year Teofilo Calcagnini, a rich feudal lord, died and Caleffini stated that his death was due to his going around wearing a mask too often.

5. Chroniclers did not point out masked women, and it is easily understandable: wealthy women did not live in the public space, and they assisted major outdoor events (mystery plays, shows, palio races, jousts...) from balconies or, in extreme cases, from the carts of the court, without being seen. The lack of personal freedom made it impossible for them to

29 «Se comenzò andare in maschara per questa citade, de licentia delo illustrissimo duca nostro, per piacere dela zoventude»: Pardi 1937, p. 43.

30 «Per ricreazione della gioventù»: therein, p. 58.

31 «Per dare piacere ali zoveni»: therein, p. 71.

32 «Li zoveni di Ferrara hozi comenzòno andare in maschara de licentia delo illustrissimo duca nostro»: therein, p. 171.

33 «Io li andai [in maschara] cum uno don Nicolò Pisanelo, capellano de messer Nicolò Maria da Este fiolo di messer Gurone. Et mi strazai le manege de una camissa di renso»: Griguolo 2006, p. 135 (the borrowing is on page 108).

enjoy the opportunity of moving incognito that disguises gave. Women appear in the narrative of carnival as the public at the windows, or as helpless objects of peculiar assaults: they received a pot of excrement in the face. The pot was broken on the victim's face, and this means that their face was scarred.³⁴ Apart from the women stabbed in 1482, this is the only type of aggression against women I could find. Since only in some cases did the sources give a reason about the aggression, I think that it could be a misogynistic behavior: a cruel and violent "joke" against women in general. As regards Ferrara, in short, we can say that circulating in masks was a pastime reserved to men, and especially young males.

We already mentioned the ritual violence that took place in particular circumstances. I think that acts of violence perpetrated during the carnival period, precisely by virtue of their timing, could somehow be defined as "ritual". Yet, some ages were (and are still today) more violent than others, in any period of the year. On 1494, January 31, Duke Ludovico Maria Sforza wrote to his secretary Bartolomeo Calco about the problem caused by «molte compagnie de giovani zentil homini et de alter sorte, le quali forse per essergli prohibite 'l stravestirse vanno la nocte in grosso e con arme per la città ali lochi dove stano qualche femine deshoneste et commetteno deli inconvenienti».³⁵ The letter was written during Carnival, thus it would be useful to check the announcements made during the end of the century, to understand if the chaotic political situation prevented the Duke from letting his subjects circulate in masks.

Young males' violence during the middle and early modern ages is another important topic, which has not been studied much for Ferrara.³⁶ Surely,

34 On February 13, 1480, the law student Tommaso degli Arienti threw a pot of excrement to the wife of the wine carrier Machagnano («surely, for the displeasure received»): Griguolo 2006, p. 109. On February 18, 1488, «fue batudo suso la faza ad una zovene una ingistara de merda da mascare»: Cazzola 2006, p. 716. On January 12, 1489, «da mascare [...] roto fue etiam suso la faza ad una dona dabene in la Gosmaria in Ferrara una ingistara de merda et consumatoli la faza. A chi ha male suo danno»: therein, p. 732. On February 3, 1490, a masked man threw a pot of excrement to the young doctor Francesco Lombardini's wife: therein, p. 748. On February 18, 1493, the same happened to an unnamed woman: therein, p. 866.

35 ASMi, *Sforzesco, Carteggio interno*, Milano città, 1114, edited in Gazzini, 2003, p. 67.

36 A recent exception – focused on ritual violence – is Ricci 2007. Zorzi 1993, p. 187, suggests that we must be aware of the differences between various types of young people's associations. *Abbeyes* were typical of France and the Piedmont region: Barbero 1990. Brigades of young noblemen were studied in Florence (Cardini 1983), and brotherhoods

and the chronicle by Ferrarini demonstrates it clearly, university students went masked. Yet, the powerful Calcagnini also used to go masked, and he was almost fifty years old. The Duke himself went masked, and this probably entailed that many Court goers followed and imitated him. We do not have evidence if in Ferrara, during the rule of Hercules, they were more wealthy students or rather aged wealthy men to go masked. Moreover, we do not know who committed the assaults, most of which went unpunished. This does not allow us to evaluate how many of the aggressions could be ascribed to an excessive behavior without a target, how many to settling of scores: in essence, to understand the nature of the phenomenon. In the chronicle of Caleffini we also meet a very curious detail that concerns a child: January 7, 1488 a child is found in mask, and immediately taken to prison.³⁷ Why was he taken to prison? I do not know. That walking masked was an inappropriate activity for a child maybe should be obvious to contemporaries. I would point out that it was the same penalty that was inflicted on those who circulated armed in mask. In fact, the Duke granted the right to circulate masked, but with numerous edicts, he forbade masked people from carrying bladed weapons.

6. Yet, what else did these masked men do, besides committing aggressions with knives and sticks, and throwing excrement on women? On January 14, 1496, while thanking the Marquis Francesco Gonzaga, who had invited him to spend the Carnival in Mantua, the professor of law Floriano Dolfo states: «during carnival it is custom to self-disguise in mask and to have fun privately and publicly». He declares to be too old and ill for the invitation, but the description of sexual excesses on which Dolfo insists is probably more a literary *topos* than a reality.³⁸

We do not have much information about public celebration during carnival, apart from the performances of comedies for which the Este court was widely famous, and the marvelous parties that the Duke organized. Maybe that which Elizabeth Pavan wrote about Venice can

were investigated in Milan: Gazzini 2003; Taddei 2009. Late medieval associations of young males in Ferrara have not been studied yet.

37 Caleffini describes him as a *puer*, that is a young male between 7 and 14 years and commonly, in Italy, people in this age were not fully responsible for their illegal actions. As is known, *infantia* and *pueritia* are very wide arguments. On violence perpetrated by children, for reasons of space, I quote only Orlando 2011.

38 Minutelli 2002, p. 75.

also be applied to Ferrara: «Les chroniqueurs ignorant la liesse du carnaval pour célébrer les seules fêtes officielles [...] et ce silence révèle en lui-même l'opposition de deux cultures».³⁹

In fact, Zambotti wrote that on February 1st, 1478, the masked Duke, with many «squires and gentlemen», went in the square and undertook a battle against four courtiers: the Duke and his entourage threw eggs at the courtiers who, wearing a rudimentary armor, were trying to defend themselves and hit them.⁴⁰ On January 28, 1481 three hundred students in masks, including the same Zambotti, who writes of the event, marched to the sound of the drum up to the Court, challenging the courtiers in a battle with snowballs. Receiving no response, they changed their objective and dedicated themselves to throwing snowballs against the windows of women.⁴¹ On February 18, 1488, masked men threw a haberdasher in the moat of the castle; and masked men took off no less than 12 caps from the heads of passersby. We must recall that removing the cap from the head was considered a criminal offense, as an act that was detrimental to the dignity of the person. In short, apart from the throwing of snowballs and the Duke's expensive pastimes, all the information concerning persons circulating masked which chroniclers give refers us to serious behavior that was punishable by the law.

As we already mentioned, the vast majority of the described attacks went unpunished. This could be because, very often, the attack was planned, and the sudden flight of the masked person prevented them from

39 Pavan 1981, p. 354.

40 «Lo illustrissimo duca nostro cum multi soi scuderi e zintilhomini immascharati vèneo in Piazza con cesti da ove al brazo, a zugare e combattere con quatro cortexani, li quali havevano li bauti grandi in testa straforadi e lanze grande in mano, che menavano adosso a quelli dele ove. E cusì per una hora combatèno, e tuti quelli se ritrovòno in Piazza forno caregi de ove rotte»: Pardi 1937, p. 44.

41 «Li scholari lezisti, siando sta' asaltati heri in le scole de San Francesco dali cortexani con la neve, mascharati, domete che se lezeva, hozi deliberatamente circha trexento immascharati, con una penna in testa, andasseno, a son de tamburo, ala Corte del duca a chiamarli a fare ala neve, né may volseno descendere. E messer Nicolò Maria, filo de messer Guron, hera nostro capo. E tuto hozi nevò e sempre andassemo tragando per la terra ale fenestre ale done, da hore 20 insino ad hore 22»: therein, pp. 84-85. A battle with eggs was performed in Bologna, during the carnival of 1482. In the words of Ghiardacci, this was "a new game", never played before: Sorbelli 1915-1932, p. 224. An Anonymous Spanish chronicler while writing about the carnival in Jaén on 1464 also described a battle of eggs. Still, in this case the eggs were boiled: Ruiz 1994, pp. 296-318.

being tracked down. This leads us to question the motives of the attacks: in the case of the Jew, it seems that it was the failure of the return of a pawned dress; in the case of women, at least on one occasion, Ferrarini states that the victim had caused a displeasure to her aggressor (perhaps she had rejected his advances?). In some cases, it was simply robbery; in others, feuds between rival factions. For example, those who made a raid during a party in the house of the Marcelli family (on February 18, 1488), among all those present, beat only members of Sacrati family.⁴² Maybe some injuries and killings were retaliation against people linked to power: e.g. the knight of the *podestà*, was almost slain (still on February 18, 1488),⁴³ the Judge of victuals Francesco Leuti, had his head broken in February 18, 1493.⁴⁴ Similar assaults occurred even to members of the ducal family, like Folco d'Este (1481)⁴⁵ and Scipione d'Este (1493).⁴⁶ Ferrarini writes firsthand about a case in which, for an amorous rivalry, he was a step away from putting his hand to the knife, but he stopped in time (9 February 1482).⁴⁷ Sometimes, however, the reasons for the attacks remain unknown: the son of the Duke's jester was assaulted and robbed of his hood on 13 February, 1492.⁴⁸ Was he robbed as owner of his hood, or because, even as the mere son of a jester, he somehow embodied noble power? Was the murder committed by masked people in the house of Jewish money lenders (23 January, 1492) due to hard feelings toward Jews, to money matters, or to other unknown causes?⁴⁹ Why on January 7, 1492 was «a poor craftsman badly injured»?⁵⁰ The attacks by masked people, and the whole experience of the carnival in its entirety, are an extremely complex phenomenon. Yet, in some cases the explanation for individual assaults is recognizable. For example, in 1470, the Earl of Porretta writes about a murder in Bononia:

42 Cazzola 2006, p. 717.

43 Therein, p. 716.

44 Therein, pp. 865-866.

45 Griguolo 2006, p. 122.

46 Cazzola 2006, p. 866.

47 Griguolo 2006, p. 137.

48 Cazzola 2006, pp. 832-833.

49 Therein, p. 829.

50 Therein, p. 826.

Recordo che adi ultimo de zenaro fu morto Piero Angelo del Canzeliero, che era in maschara, da Lodovigo dal Capello che non era in maschara, perché el ditto morto cum uno compagno assaltano il predito Ludovico a posta de Mathio d'i Nobili cum lo quale Ludovico el di denanzi haveva havuto questione in lo dacio dale Moline, e lo predito Piero Angelo diete in prima due grande bastonate a Ludovico.⁵¹

This testimony confirms that some assaults from people in mask could be not only planned, but also even for hire. Indeed, although it was a serious crime, the fact that in only one day 12 caps were taken off the heads of pedestrians in Ferrara's square may suggests that it was a group action.

This research is still only just beginning. For that reasons, at present I do not attempt to codify what I have found in the cited chronicles. Italian medieval carnival is a very complex – and scarcely documented – topic; therefore, to make an interpretation of 15th-century carnival is risky. Too many elements are yet to be defined, such as the role of popular culture expressions among the events characterizing the carnival, or that of misogynistic assaults, or of common delinquency. Only by shedding light on daily Renaissance life will it be possible to locate which factors belonged specifically to the carnival; and only by getting to know medieval carnival in more depth it will be possible to understand how subsequent developments modified its previous features.

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51 Comelli 1898-1899, p. 357.

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