

Crossing Genres: A Newcomer in the Transnational History of Almanacs

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I. BARBANERA AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY ON ALMANACS AND CHEAP PRINT

Despite the vast historiography on Italian almanacs, historians have neglected a whole family of publications, issued from at least 1762 under the name of the fictional astronomer Barbanera¹. No mention of Barbanera can be detected in the numerous studies issued in Italy in the wake of Cuaz and Braida's preliminary works from the 1980's², which were, in turn, triggered by French historiography. The latter had in fact driven attention towards the circulation of almanacs among lower classes in 18th century France, especially thanks to Geneviève Bollème³. In the 1980's a new generation of historians revealed that there was a greater interest in the circulation of such ephemeral printed products across social and cultural boundaries, fostering a new wave of studies that also flourished in Italy⁴. Nonetheless, either difficulty in tracing copies of such diverse and ephemeral publications or the apparent immutability of the Barbanera almanacs that remained loyal to the first editions' outline for over three centuries, might have resulted in the little interest expressed towards the publication.

The establishment of a dedicated foundation and research center (Fondazione Barbanera 1762)⁵, has recently made it possible to overcome such difficulties and account

¹ For practical reasons the name of the fictional editor is used to identify all of the different editions, whose titles, mentioned when necessary, are diverse and ununiform. Since it is not a title, the term Barbanera will not be identified as such by the means of typographical conventions.

² M. CUAZ, *Almanacchi e «cultura media» nell'Italia del Settecento*, «Studi storici», 25, 1984, 2, pp. 353-361 and L. BRAIDA, *Le guide del tempo. Produzione, contenuti e forme degli almanacchi piemontesi nel Settecento*, Torino, Dep. Subalpina di Storia Patria, 1989

³ G. BOLLEME, *Les Almanachs populaires aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle. Essai d'histoire sociale*, Paris, La Haye Mouton, 1969. An interest on the history of astrology has conversely fostered the study of almanacs in the English-speaking world after the work of B. CAPP, *Astrology and the Popular Press. English Almanacs: 1500-1800*, London, Faber, 1979.

⁴ For an account of such studies see Marina Formica, *Gli almanacchi romani del XVIII e del XIX secolo*, «Studi settecenteschi», 15 (1995), pp. 115-162. More recent works worth mentioning at an international level are: J. SALMAN - G. VERHOEVEN, *The Comptoir-Almanacs of Gilles Joosten Saeghman. Research into Seventeenth-Century Almanacs in the Dutch Republic*, «Quaerendo», 23, 1993, 2, pp. 93-114 and M. PERKINS, *Visions of the Future. Almanacs, Time, and Cultural Change 1775-1870*, Oxford, Oup, 1996.

⁵ Located in Spello, in the province of Perugia Fondazione Barbanera 1762 (FB) preserves more than 8,000 almanacs, published both in Italy and abroad, and especially the ones ascribed to the astronomer called Barbanera. These were frequently issued in Foligno, the birthplace of the longer selling edition, which is still published nowadays.

for what will be called throughout this article, ‘a family of almanacs’ in light of the more recent issues related to the historiography on cheap print⁶.

How can Barbanera be of interest to an international audience of scholars when Barbanera almanacs have been characterized by their national circulation, at least prior to the late 19th century? Unlike other almanacs – the most famous being *Der Hinkende Bot*/*Le Messenger Boiteux* – Barbanera almanacs were not printed in a border area and did not undergo any translation or adaptation⁷. On the contrary, it was not until the end of the 19th century that Barbanera almanacs traveled overseas, following the paths of Italian immigrants, both in North America and South America⁸. Despite this, Barbanera almanacs represent an interesting case study from a transnational perspective. These are outlined below.

First, alongside the history of the publication of Barbanera almanacs, we can also retrace different phenomena that are likely to enrich the international state of the art. There may have been a reduction in interest in the field of almanacs in recent years, as the field appears to have been fully explored by a huge number of scholarly works⁹. However, this research deserves to be kept alive through a transnational perspective, as was argued during the international conference held in 1999 in Versailles St. Quentin-en-Yvelines¹⁰.

Second, the aforementioned body of research has led to the assumption that the cross-cultural circulation of cheap print does not only need to be read in a geo-cultural

⁶ Some of the following considerations have been already published in Italian in E. MARAZZI, *Sotto il segno di Barbanera. Continuità e trasformazioni di un almanacco tra XVIII e XXI secolo*, Milano, Mimesis, 2017, issued from the research on FB’s collections and other local archives.

⁷ The Italian *Gran pescatore di Chiaravalle* also ought to be mentioned in a brief account of ‘transnational almanacs’, since it was translated into Spanish; not to mention the manifold European editions of Franklin’s *Poor Richard Almanac*. On almanacs in translation cf. H.-J. LÜSEBRINK – Y.- G. MIX – J.-Y. MOLLIER – P. SOREL (eds.), *Les lectures du peuple en Europe et dans les Amériques (XVIIe-XXe siècles)*, Bruxelles, Complexe, 2003.

⁸ We have evidence, in 1917, 1932, 1938, and in 1960 of at least three different editions deliberately issued for an audience of emigrants. A 1938 item is part of an edition printed in Naples and distributed in the USA, whereas the ones printed in 1917 and 1932 were printed on behalf of two credit institute based respectively in Massachusetts and in Argentina. In the 1960’s a Barbanera co. publishing enterprise based in New York issued an edition that was manifestly inspired to the ones printed in Foligno (see further). The reference items can be found in FB, call numbers: BN 1/12.1917; BN 1/15.1938; BN 1.Misc(1); BN 1/16.1960-1968.

⁹ For an exhaustive bibliography of the Italian research on almanacs see M. FORMICA, *Gli almanacchi romani del XVIII e del XIX secolo*, «Studi settecenteschi», 15, 1995, pp. 115-162.

¹⁰ Proceedings edited by H. -J. LÜSEBRINK, Y.- G. MIX – J.-Y. MOLLIER – P. SOREL (eds.), *Les lectures du peuple en Europe et dans les Amériques*, cit.

perspective, but also from a socio-cultural point of view¹¹. This article focuses on the second option, and retraces in the Barbanera almanac a transnational phenomenon, by exploring: What can be defined as the ‘porosity’ of popular publishing? It can be argued that in addition to including in its pages some excerpts inspired by the most successful publishing genres of the time for over three centuries, Barbanera represents a relevant example of the now renowned mobility and mutability of almanacs and of their multifarious reception across the social ladder.

II. BARBANERA’S HISTORY IN A TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

1. *A reassuringly fixed structure*

As often happens in the history of almanacs, Barbanera is not a proper title. Rather, it is the name of an astronomer to which a wide range of publications that prophesized the future were attributed. Although Barbanera almanacs were printed in a range of different areas, they were predominantly printed in central Italy, especially in Foligno, which was at the time situated in the Papal States. Nowadays it is located in the region of Umbria. The astronomer’s first attested mention dates back to 1753 and is actually related to a Bolognese almanac. Nevertheless, Barbanera was to earn greater success in Foligno, where the oldest mention can be traced back to a one-sheet calendar from 1762, entitled *Discorso generale del famoso Barbanera per l'anno 1762*¹². (III. 1)

Barbanera’s family produced both one-sheet calendars, especially in the 18th century, and almanacs in the form of booklets. The oldest booklet printed in Foligno has been recently discovered in the *Sächsische Landesbibliothek* of Dresden and was originally issued in 1768 (III. 2). The name Barbanera has been connected to the Umbrian town ever since, due to the fact that the production of almanacs in Foligno is the most significant here both in terms of editions and the number of items preserved. Furthermore, Barbanera almanacs have been increasingly identified with Foligno throughout the centuries, and in

¹¹ Cf. R. CHARITER – H.-J. LÜSEBRINK (eds.), *Colportage et lecture populaire. Imprimés de large circulation en Europe XVIIe-XIXe siècles*, Paris, Imec/Éditions de la MSH, 1996; for the Italian reflection on such themes see L. BRAIDA - M. INFELISE (eds), *Libri per tutti. I generi editoriali di larga circolazione tra antico regime ed età contemporanea*, Torino, UTET, 2010, which also contains accounts for the French, German, and Spanish historiography on cheap print.

¹²[*General Discourse for the year 1762*], printed in Foligno by Pompeo Campana, cf. FB, call number F.1.

the 1960s a Barbanera almanac published in the USA was even defined «tipo Foligno» [Foligno-like] in its subtitle¹³. Hence, this article will focus on the different editions of Barbanera almanacs in Foligno that have tied their name to the proper long-seller. Despite having undergone a substantial evolution due to changes in demand, Barbanera is still published nowadays with decent print runs¹⁴.

As far as some contextualization is concerned, Barbanera can be ascribed to «the predominant model»¹⁵ in Italian 18th-century almanacs, specifically: a booklet containing both a calendar and astrological forecasts. Alongside these, the *Discorso generale* [general discourse], in the form of a prophesy, contained predictions for the year to come. These concerned not only climate and illness, but also aimed to foresee military events, natural catastrophes and royal family births, which were all said to be determined by the observation of planets' overlapping. Such elements mark a relevant difference in comparison with simpler almanacs, which limited themselves to weather forecasts in order to not fall into the trap of judicial astrology that had been banned by the Catholic Church in the 16th century. Nonetheless, Barbanera's tendency to predict events beyond the limits of what was called natural astrology does not have to be interpreted as subversive. Almanacs contained a *Protesta* [claim] affirming that the supreme judicial authority of God was recognized, as stated by Catholic principles and dispositions¹⁶.

As in many other almanacs, the *prognosticon* [prognostication] was followed by the following elements:

- Chronology;
- Calendar;
- Religious holidays;
- Phases of the moon;
- Ephemeris;
- Markets and Fairs;

¹³ Cf. the items preserved at FB, call numbers BN 1/16.1960-1968.

¹⁴ Over 200,000 copies a year according to the more recent print runs. Such numbers are achieved also thanks to business to business policies that allow the publications of co-edited almanacs for corporate gifts.

¹⁵ L. BRAIDA, *Le guide del tempo*, cit., pp. 109-117

¹⁶ On the fallouts of such controversy surrounding the editing of almanacs in Italy see E. CASALI, *Le spie del cielo. Oroscopi, lunari e almanacchi nell'Italia moderna*, Torino, Einaudi, 2003, pp. 62-69. On judicial astrology in Italy cf. M. AZZOLINI, *The political uses of astrology: predicting the illness and death of princes, kings and popes in the Italian Renaissance*, in R. RALLEY - L. KASSELL (eds.), *Stars, Spirits, Signs: Towards a History of Astrology 1100-1800*, Monographic section of «Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences», 41, 2, June 2010, pp. 135-145.

- Currency conversion; and
- Lineage.

The abovementioned elements were always presented in the same succession throughout the centuries, in order to reassure the reader. Nonetheless, despite the model being transnational, and despite the fact that titles were being reused in different areas, each publication was deeply rooted in its local area thanks to sections such as fair and markets calendars, the timetable for post and currency, which were compiled according to the circulation. On the other hand, as it will be argued, contents changed and embraced a whole range of new themes in the frame of a solid and durable structure.

2. *Competition and agreements among almanac printers: some hypotheses*

Besides Barbanera's apparent static nature, another factor that might have influenced the weak interest towards this almanac is the almost exclusive preservation of copies printed in the 19th century. This means that it mainly concerns the late modern period, an age marked by a multifarious offer of printed products that have more easily encountered the interest of scholars. As Bollème underlines¹⁷, the scarce number of issues preserved from the 18th century is another commonality across Europe. Consequently, compared to the luckier situation of calendar ephemera from the preceding and following periods, Barbanera almanacs remain partially obscure. Nonetheless, in Foligno a new interest for almanacs appears to have only emerged among publishers at the end of the 18th century. This was especially the case after a change in attitude towards religion during the Napoleonic occupation, when printers in the former Papal States (that were traditionally involved in religious publications), had to find new strategies to handle the market contraction¹⁸. Furthermore, in Foligno, they were exempt from the increasing price of paper because well-established paper mills had been present on the territory since the 14th century¹⁹. Therefore, for some printers, almanacs represented a strategy to face the decline of religious publications.

¹⁷ G. BOLLEME, *Les Almanachs populaires aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle*, cit., p. 23.

¹⁸ As suggested by M. TOSTI, *Strategie editoriali e famiglie di tipografi alla fine del Settecento. Le stamperie di Ottavio Sgariglia e Giovanni Tomassini*, in A. SINDONI - M. TOSTI (eds), *Vita religiosa, problemi sociali e impegno civile dei cattolici. Studi religiosi in onore di Alberto Monticoni*, Roma, Studium, 2009, pp. 129-142.

¹⁹ Cf. G. CASTAGNARI (ed.), *Carta e cartiere nelle Marche e nell'Umbria dalle manifatture medievali all'industrializzazione*, in «Proposte e ricerche - Quaderni», 13, 1995, pp. 185-208.

Almost all of the printers established in Foligno have published Barbanera almanacs: Pompeo Campana (18th century); Feliciano Campitelli and his heirs; Giovanni Tomassini; Francesco Fofi; and Francesco Salvati (late 19th) were the most active within the time span of interest²⁰. Even though their almanacs often contained an *Avviso* [notice], where the printer stated to be patented for that very edition, it is difficult to retrace a regular correspondence between printers and the differently featured almanac issued (III. 3). In fact, the main series were essentially four, two 48-page editions and two 64-page editions. Up until the 20th century, the whole of the four editions were always published by Campitelli and Tomassini, but even in this selected corpus, a regular correspondence between a format and a publisher can only be retraced for brief periods of time. This indicates that a sort of agreement existed among printers aiming to exploit the production of almanacs. Nevertheless, no equivalent of a stationary company or printers' corporation has been tracked down in Foligno during the time in question²¹. Therefore, we can only speculate on the existence of regulation such as the one in force within the London Stationer's company, which imposed shared printing of the authorized almanac. This was in place to control and to redistribute incomes from such a successful production²². Something more similar to the agreement among the London Ballad Partners²³ might have happened in Foligno, and it can be argued that a trust of printers specialized in cheap print was active in the Umbrian town. This alleged «entente cordiale entre les faiseurs d'almanachs» [friendly agreement among almanac makers] is described by Charles Nisard, a French 19th century observer²⁴. At the same time, in his report describing the state of the art of the so-called *littérature de colportage* in his country, Nisard depicts an ironical portrait of the plethoric productions of almanacs in a number of editions by eager

²⁰ On such printers and their involvement in almanacs see G. BRINCI, *I lunari e gli almanacchi di Foligno*, Foligno, Grafiche CMF, 2002 and E. MARAZZI, *Sotto il segno di Barbanera*, cit., pp. 25-33.

²¹ Although a proper corporation existed before, as retraced in the traditional accounts of the origins of printing in the Umbrian town by M. FALOCI PULIGNANI and T. VALENTI, published in «La bibliofilia», voll. 1-2, 1899-1901, and 27, 1926.

²² Such strategies have been described by R. MEYERS, *The Stationers' Company and the Almanack Trade*, in M. F. SUAREZ - M. L. TURNER (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. V, 1695-1830, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 723-735.

²³ H. ROLLINS, *The Black-Letter Broadside Ballad*, in «PMLA», 34, 1919, 2, pp. 258-339; T. WATT, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 42-50.

²⁴ Ch. NISARD, *Histoire des livres populaires ou De la littérature du colportage depuis l'origine de l'imprimerie jusqu'à l'établissement de la commission d'examen des livres de colportage, 30 novembre 1852*, Paris, Dentu, 1864, p. 11. To benefit from a transnational perspective on the history of this genre, it could be useful to look for similar agreements in other centers of production in order to understand if the settlement of a trust was a common strategy in all popular publishing centers.

printers in 18th and 19th century France. Such a portrait can easily be extended to the Umbrian town where Barbanera almanacs were published.

3. *The emergence of copyright and the need for diversification*

If the printers' situation reveals itself to be quite intricate, Barbanera's authors are quite also difficult to identify. Even though the «astronomer from the Appennines»²⁵ – whose observatory was believed to be situated in the local mountains – was represented in diverse features through woodcuts printed on the title pages, there was no accredited Barbanera. On the contrary, it can be argued that since time immemorial, it was printers and anonymous editors that brought Barbanera to life. Bernard Capp has made some considerations about the difference between British almanacs and French almanacs as far as compilers are concerned. Capp notes that the compilation of an almanac represented a form of professional affirmation for English astrologists, physicians, and quacks. Such an observation can be extended to other traditions, e.g. the Dutch almanacs²⁶, nevertheless in Italy and France, the editor's centrality had disappeared since the beginning of the Modern era, due to the rejection of judicial astrology²⁷. In fact, since the editor was likely to receive condemnation, the cautious choice was to remain anonymous.

Nonetheless the emergence of the concept of literary propriety, eventually set forth in Italy in 1840, caused a sort of revolution because publishers started to care about the specificity of their own editions and safeguarded their rights. Stamps of literary property together with announcements of court cases against competitors begin to appear on the covers and pages of the almanacs. Despite this, counterfeiting still proliferated, and in 1874 a brandnew edition was issued in Naples that imitated the booklets from Foligno that were circulating in the central region and the southern peninsula. Nonetheless, in 1900, Luigi Chiurazzi, the farsighted Neapolitan publisher of the counterfeit edition, asserted that his almanacs had nothing to do with the one printed in Foligno. His idea was to inform everybody that his edition of the Barbanera was something newer and more accurate than the old-fashioned Umbrian almanac²⁸. In this way Chiurazzi managed to

²⁵ This mention, «astronomo degli Appennini», was recurrent in title pages and often also in the text of the almanacs published throughout the period at the focus of this article.

²⁶ B. CAPP, *Astrology and the Popular Press*, cit., pp. 270-292. On Dutch almanacs see J. SALMAN - G. VERHOEVEN, *The comptoir-almanacs of Gillis Joosten Saeghman*, cit.

²⁷ E. CASALI, *Le spie del cielo*, cit., pp. 62-69.

²⁸ Cfr. the item in FB, call number BN 1/6.1900.

benefit from the fame that by that time was strictly bound to Barbanera's name and at the same time turn his almanac into a completely different publication. This strategy led to two relevant achievements. First, the almanac does not risk being banned for copyright reasons. Second, the almanac will progressively include themes and content more likely to attract urban audiences in a city whose fabric of society is extremely different from Barbanera's original context.

The competition of the 19th century, triggered by an increasingly wide range of popular publications and the emergence of a bourgeois audience, laid the basis for the emergence, as far as yearly issues are concerned, of other publishing genres such as *étrennes* [gift books], or coffee-table books throughout Europe²⁹. As far as Italy is concerned, Milan became the production center of *étrennes*, which represented the bourgeois evolution of almanacs par excellence; after that, illustrated press and book series would take over. This did not mean the downfall of almanacs, especially in more peripheral areas. The same phenomenon has been singled out in France during the second half of the 19th century, which represents an unexpected revival age for almanacs³⁰. The same happened in French-speaking Switzerland up to 1925³¹. The case of Foligno is an important piece of evidence that almanacs also remained alive, healthy, and, as it will be argued in the next section, even evolved.

III. BARBANERA AND THE 19TH-CENTURY PUBLISHING GENRES

Lodovica Braida has highlighted the direction taken by Italian almanacs at the end of the 18th century: from vehicles of prejudice to «powerful means of education»³². This happened, among other, in the wake of Pietro Verri's idea that the almanac represented «la sola strada per potervi dire una parola così di fretta in passando» [the only way to tell

²⁹ The evolution of some almanacs into different book has been studied, for France, by V. SARRAZIN, *L'Exemple des Étrennes Parisiennes. Succès, évolution et mutation d'un genre d'almanachs du XVIIIe au XIXe siècle*, in H.-J. LÜSEBRINK – Y.- G. MIX – J.-Y. MOLLIER – P. SOREL (eds.), *Les lectures du peuple*, cit. pp. 39-48.

³⁰ J.-Y. MOLLIER, *Les éditeurs d'almanach au XIXe siècle entre tradition et modernité*, *ibid.*, pp. 205-223 has given account of the same phenomenon in France.

³¹ Cf. F. VALLOTTON, *Le rôle des almanachs au sein des politiques éditoriales des éditeurs suisses romands (1750-1950)*, *ibid.*, pp. 225-233.

³² Cf. L. BRAIDA, *Les almanachs italiens du XVIIIe siècle. Véhicules de « faux préjugés » ou « puissants moyens d'éducation » ?*, *ibid.*, pp 259-270.

you (the reader - author's note) a word in a hurry]³³. In general, new and diverse typologies came to light that clearly show the flexibility of the genre; these included agrarian almanacs, court almanacs, and city guides in the form of almanacs³⁴.

A superficial review of the editions reveals that such phenomenon seems to have involved neither Barbanera, nor other almanacs of the same typology. However, it is possible to get a different impression through a more in-depth reading, especially when it comes to the introductory section entitled *Dialogue*. Such text represented a dialogue between Barbanera and his friend Silvano, who allegedly visited Barbanera every year at the end of the summer in order to let the astronomer give him the manuscript of the almanac for next year. In such a fictional context, Silvano would hurry back to Foligno and deliver Barbanera's text to the printer. But before doing this, Barbanera would talk to him briefly, instructing him about a different topic each year.

The dialogue represents the written transposition of educational conversation. Together with other informative texts placed between the months of the calendar, this represents the main source for developing the argument of Barbanera's internal evolution. In fact, in a great number of almanacs, the dialogue texts represent the window through which the most successful coeval editorial genres entered the almanacs in the age of the so-called reading revolution³⁵.

First of all, lots of 19th-century almanacs contain biographies of inventors. The popularization of historical, geographical and scientific notions was intrinsic to a great number of almanacs – from the *Poor Richard* by Benjamin Franklin up to agrarian almanacs of the 19th century. Additionally, in previous years, from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (1st-2nd century) onwards, biographies of distinguished people, have been a vehicle for conveying such notions. Nevertheless it is important to remember how, in the Italian

³³ P. VERRI, *Il Gran Zoroastro ossia astrologiche predizioni per l'anno bisestile 1764*, now in Id., *Scritti letterari, filosofici e satirici*, edited by G. FRANCONI, Roma, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2015, p. 560.

³⁴ Cf. L. BRAIDA, *Les almanachs italiens. Évolutions et stéréotypes d'un genre (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)*, in R. CHARITER – H.-J. LÜSEBRINK (eds.), *Colportage et lecture populaire*, cit.

³⁵ On this issue cf. R. WITTMANN, *Was there a Reading Revolution at the End of the Eighteenth Century?.*, in G. CAVALLO – R. CHARTIER, *A History of Reading in the West*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, pp. 284-312 (or. ed. Roma, 1995); B. DOOLEY, *La seconde révolution de la lecture dans l'Italie du XVIIIe siècle*, in «Revue d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine», 49, 3, juillet-septembre 2002, pp. 69-88; J.-F. GILMONT, *Une révolution de la lecture au XVIIIe siècle?*, in «Navigare nei mari dell'umano sapere». *Biblioteche e circolazione libraria nel Trentino e nell'Italia del XVIII secolo*, Trento, Soprintendenza per i beni librari e archivistici, 2008, pp. 129-139. As far as Italy is concerned, the emergence of a proper wider, mass audience has to be postponed to the 19th century. Cf. M. INFELISE, *Libri per tutti*, in L. BRAIDA - M. INFELISE (eds), *Libri per tutti*, cit., pp. 3-19.

coeval publishing market, biographies and anthologies of biographies became a proper genre³⁶. The Florentine Gaspero Barbera has to be mentioned as a relevant example of a publisher that believed in biographies as a means towards civic education, which should involve popular classes in the struggle for the unification of the country. After 1861 biographies remained a fruitful business if the Milanese publisher Treves, who addressed mainly urban bourgeoisie. Treves published, among others, the translation of a collection of biographies entitled *Les Héros du travail*, by the French scientist and popularizer Gustave Tissandier. The Italian adaptation addressed a diverse audience, from schoolchildren to the whole family³⁷.

Second, dialogues contain diverse informative notions of all sorts, among which a blatant example is worth mentioning. For example, in the almanac for 1840 Barbanera explained to Silvano what an Agenda [diary] is, and how to use it³⁸. It is not by chance that agendas represented, at the end of the 18th century, one path of evolution for almanacs³⁹. Besides representing another expression of the self-help trend that affected all different kinds of publications addressed to lowbrow audiences – the use of an agenda is presented as a way to organize one's time and in that way improve one's quality of life – the 1840 dialogue provides a scenery for interaction between two editorial genres on the market at that time.

The topics that progressively appeared in Barbanera's dialogues throughout the 19th and 20th centuries increasingly included forms and content that were typical of the coeval literature addressing less cultivated people. Health and physical exercise and other hygienic precepts were the most frequent topic addressed in the dialogues. For instance, in some almanacs an aversion emerges towards employing wet-nurses and others frequently insist on the right nutrition depending on one's daily activities. Such precepts were often to be recalled by sayings, adages or other brief texts that were included in the calendar section, usually at the bottom of the page.

Another frequent topic of information in the dialogue and the excerpts related to geography, sometimes it even included an account of travels and exploration, as in an

³⁶ Cf. M.P. CASALENA, *Biografie. La scrittura delle vite in Italia tra politica, società e cultura (1796-1915)*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2012. See also M. HUISMAN, *The Written Portrait: Biographical and Autobiographical Publishing in the Nineteenth Century*, in «Quaerendo» 2007, 37, 3, pp. 226 – 243.

³⁷ See also S. LANARO, *Il Plutarco italiano: l'istruzione del 'popolo' dopo l'Unità*, in *Storia d'Italia. Annali*. IV, C. VIVANTI (ed.), *Intellettuali e potere*, Torino, Einaudi, 1981, pp. 551-587.

³⁸ Cf. the item in FB, call number BN 1/7.1940.

³⁹ Cf. L. BRAIDA, *Dall'almanacco all'agenda. Lo spazio per le osservazioni del lettore nelle «guide del tempo» italiane (XVIII-XIX secolo)*, in A. MESSERLI, - R. CHARTIER (eds), *Lesen und Schreiben in Europa (1500-1900)*, Basel, Schwabe, 2000, pp. 107-138.

1881 item⁴⁰. This was another trend exploited by publishers in the wake of colonial experiences. The activities of geographical societies not only fostered scientific publications, but also diverse publications, often in installments, that largely targeted low- and middlebrow audiences. The Italian readers, albeit lacking a colonial quest to follow by the means of the press, were very receptive towards narrations of this nature imported from France and England⁴¹, which might explain why, at a certain point, they also entered almanacs.

Travel and exploration accounts can be considered part of the scientific popularization that occurred through the press and books that also met with great success from 19th-century readers⁴². Information regarding agricultural techniques and scientific information like the breeding of silkworms (which was a widespread activity in the region), the use of microscopes, and the invention of the lightning rod exemplify a similar trend⁴³. Albeit less frequently, the dialogue also displayed self-help suggestions like the aforementioned paragraph on planning one's activities using a diary and, in an 1879 item, good manners represent the main topic⁴⁴.

To summarize, anyone who is acquainted with the most successful literary genres of that time would easily recognize them in the pages of almanac, be it: science popularization, hygienic education, biographies of self-made people (a classic of self-help literature), travel and exploration reports, fictional narratives and so forth⁴⁵.

Jacques Michon has argued that 19th century Franco-Canadian almanacs represented a useful location for advertisement of editions by their publishers⁴⁶. This is only partially the case of Barbanera, since its publishers were not engaged in significant publishing activities up to the 20th century.

⁴⁰ Item preserved at FB, call number BN 1.1881.

⁴¹ Cf. E. MARAZZI, *Translating for the Common Reader. An Ongoing Research on Science and Education in the Italian Book Trade, 1865-1903*, in *Bibliothecae.it*, 6 (2017), n. 2, DOI: 10.6092/issn.2283-9364/7701, Last accessed April 12, 2018.

⁴² Cf. for the Italian situation, P. GOVONI, *Un pubblico per la scienza. La divulgazione scientifica nell'Italia in formazione*, Roma, Carocci, 2002.

⁴³ Cf. items preserved at FB, call numbers BN 1/3.1859; BN 1/3.1861; BN 1/3.1880; BN 1.1894.

⁴⁴ Item preserved at FB, call number BN 1.1879.

⁴⁵ For accounts of the publishing genres in 19th-century Italy cf. the articles by M.I. PALAZZOLO; M. INFELISE; A.GIGLI MARCHETTI; A. CHEMELLO in G. TURI (ed.), *Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea*, Firenze, Giunti, 1997. On science popularization in Italy see P. GOVONI, *Un pubblico per la scienza. La divulgazione scientifica nell'Italia in formazione*, Roma, Carocci, 2002.

⁴⁶ Cf. Jacques Michon, *L'almanach comme vecteur des stratégies éditoriales au Québec au temps de la naissance d'une littérature nationale (1880-1939)*, in H.-J. LÜSEBRINK – Y.- G. MIX – J.-Y. MOLLIER – P. SOREL (eds), *Les lectures du peuple...*, cit., pp. 233-240.

This circulation of topics is not new to the transnational history of almanacs either. Bollème has argued that themes from the *Bibliothèque bleue* were part of the almanacs especially before their further specialization from the end of the 18th century⁴⁷. Both in Italy and abroad, a relevant part of almanac production was to act as a tool for cultivated people and philanthropists to reach peasants and common people and to try to educate them. In Foligno no manifest evolution occurred, but the contacts with coeval literature represent a strategy of innovation by printers who ended up working as unaware mediators of a literature that would have hardly reached non-urbanized readers. It can be argued that publishers such as Campitelli, Tomassini and later Salvati and Campi, who would lead the production of almanacs in the first half of 20th century, were unconsciously or semi-consciously able to bring content to an audience of new readers that were unlikely to be reached by proper books, models and other recent editorial productions. Those forms can be said to have properly crossed genres by the means of almanacs.

IV. SOME CUES FOR FURTHER TRANSNATIONAL ANALYSIS

The dialogue section is a specificity of the Barbanera almanacs printed in Foligno and represents an extremely interesting corpus for an in-depth analysis of the publication. Traces of orality in almanacs have only been episodically studied thus far⁴⁸. Therefore it is useful to briefly linger on this topic in this section in the wake of the more recent and stimulating reflection on the role played by orality in the history of the written culture⁴⁹.

On the one hand, the choice to open the publication with a paragraph organized as a dialogue between the astronomer and a peasant from Foligno easily recalls the dialogic structure of catechisms and other pedagogical tools that have been in use since the Middle Ages. On the other hand, this choice has to be considered in connection to the frequent presence of predictions in verses within the *prognosticon* and of rhymed sayings throughout the calendar. The musicality of rhymes has played a relevant role in the oral

⁴⁷ G. BOLLEME, *Les Almanachs populaires aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle*, cit., pp. 32-34.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Conclusion*, in H.-J. LÜSEBRINK – Y.- G. MIX – J.-Y. MOLLIER – P. SOREL (eds), *Les lectures du peuple...*, cit., p. 344.

⁴⁹ Cf. S. DALL'AGLIO – B. RICHARDSON – M. ROSPOCHER (eds.), *Voices and Texts in Early Modern Italian Society*, London, Routledge, 2017. On the role played by orality in the circulation of literature at diverse levels of the social ladder in Italy, see also M. ROGGERO, *Le carte piene di sogni. Testi e lettori in età moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2006. As far as Spain is concerned, enlightening examples are displayed in A. CASTILLO GOMEZ (ed.), *Libro y lectura en la península ibérica y América (siglos XIII a XVIII)*, Valladolid, La Imprenta, 2003.

circulation of chivalry romances in Italy up to the 20th century⁵⁰, and the combination of rhymed verses and sayings with an opening paragraph deliberately reproduces an oral exchange that allows us to suppose that the oral fruition of the more narrative parts of the almanac were taken into account by the editors. Although no evidence of oral reading practices of Barbanera almanacs have emerged to date, the presence of similar hints cannot be neglected and represents a suggestion to retrace evidence for oral fruition in a wider, transnational corpus of almanacs in order to foster research in this direction.

The interest in the oral dimensions of written culture relates to another very promising focus for a renewed study of almanacs in the wake of recent international historiography: the study of readers' reception. As Robert Darnton argued in his manifesto for the history of reading⁵¹, besides a process of abstract thinking, the act of reading is also expressed in concrete practices, places, and circumstances, which have left traces in extremely diversified sources. Such sources are increasingly rare the further we go down the social ladder. Nonetheless, due to their relationship with everyday life, almanacs provide a relatively large amount of evidence thanks to the practice of annotation, as already envisaged by Braida⁵², and recently researched extensively by means of the digital humanities⁵³.

Barbanera almanacs represent a key to accessing the world of 19th century readers because of a relatively large number of annotated copies. In an item issued in 1887 we can even retrace the first mark of possession : a stamp by a secondary school teacher who bought Barbanera almanac's throughout his long life, remaining loyal to the edition issued by the printer Campitelli, as further marks of possession show. The teacher, named Pietro A. Vasile, seems to be interested in astronomical phenomena and checks and corrects the predictions provided in the almanacs.

What can we infer from his *marginalia*? First, an important confirmation that, even at the end of the 19th century and later, almanacs were bought and used by what we can

⁵⁰ Cf. M. ROGGERO, *Le carte piene di sogni*, p. 38.

⁵¹ Cf. R. DARNTON, *First steps towards a history of reading*, in «Australian Journal of French Studies», 23, 1986, pp. 5-30.

⁵² L. BRAIDA, *Dall'almanacco all'agenda*, cit.

⁵³ See the Almanac Archive project, that will digitise annotated British almanacs dating from 1750 to 1850, <http://almanacarchive.org>. On this project cf. L. ECKERT – J. GRANDISON, *The Almanac Archive: Theorizing Marginalia and "Duplicate"*, in *Copies in the Digital Realm*, in *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 2016, 1, 1. <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/10/1/000240/000240.html>
Last accessed April 12, 2018.

define as a middle/highbrow audience (supplementary sporadic evidence is provided by other Barbanera almanacs than the ones owned by Vasile⁵⁴). Second, there is evidence that some readers were willing to remain loyal to one particular edition. Only once was Basile unable to avoid the pitfall of a counterfeit edition from a publisher in Rome that claimed to be the legitimate successor of the Campitelli family. Furthermore, in 1936, another reader wrote «questo è falso» [this is false] on the title page of a Barbanera almanac issued by «F.lli Campi e F.llo», a tricky formula invented by publisher Campi. In fact scarcely literate readers were very likely to misread «F.lli Campi e F.llo» and to take it for the businesses' spelling of Feliciano Campitelli⁵⁵. Third, there is evidence of the almanacs being widespread in the center and Italy's southern peninsula given the *marginalia* written by Vasile, who was living in Trivento (which is now located in the Molise region), and by other owners of Barbanera issues.

In the end, the study of annotated almanacs allows us to reflect on the uses of writing at the lower levels of the social ladder. The examination of *marginalia* in Barbanera almanacs essentially confirms the increasing use of such printed products given that writing records on paper important events that occurred to the owner⁵⁶. First of all, recalling what has already been said about diaries, the use of annotating future events to do on a calendar did not properly exist in early modern Italy. Some almanacs included blank pages since between 17th and 18th century, but they were mainly addressed to merchants that used such booklets to keep track of debits and credits. Some readers of the Babanera almanacs would have appreciated such choice, if it had been applied to their favorite Barbanera. Annotations are increasingly frequent in the course of the 19th century, so much so that in one case a reader had even pasted a piece of manually ruled paper onto the blanks of Barbanera's pages⁵⁷ (III).

Since almanacs represent an important piece of evidence of this in earlier ages, we cannot assume that only at that point of history was the calculation of time becoming a societal imperative. Nevertheless, at the same time, the increasing acquaintance with writing must have played a relevant role in such phenomenon. It is surprising to see that annotations concerned past events, despite what Barbanera had recommended about the

⁵⁴ See items preserved at FB, call numbers BN 1/7.1866; BN 1/8.1899. Further details in E. MARAZZI, *Sotto il segno di Barbanera*, cit., pp. 86-88.

⁵⁵ See item in FB, call number BN 1/10.1936.

⁵⁶ As already highlighted by L. BRAIDA for 18th century almanacs: *Dall'almanacco all'agenda*, cit.

⁵⁷ Item preserved at FB, call number BN 1.1895.

agenda in his dialogue in 1840. People mainly registered expenses, weather, medical visits after seeing the doctor, as well as exceptional events that they wanted to fix on paper (e.g., births, deaths, departures) in almanacs. As Braida has argued for the previous century⁵⁸, past rather than present is the more frequently used tense and it was only in 1911 is a future appointment annotated⁵⁹.

Among the pages of Barbanera almanacs we can also find photographs, sheets and credit notes that allow us to formulate some hypotheses on the supposed ephemeral life of almanacs. For example, we can find a note from 1857 in the Barbanera for 1854, which means that an almanac printed four years earlier was still circulating and used to keep track of events. An extremely blatant example is the Dialogue section of an almanac from 1870, which contains a credit note from 1948 and a later comment from 1952. Why should an almanac be used as a support for a reminder after such a long time? The Dialogue section of the almanac contains a possible answer. It shows readers how to calculate two important variables used to determine the date for Easter, i.e. epact (the difference in days between solar and lunar year) and the age of the moon. It can be argued that such text could be found useful at any time and therefore preserved in the reader's house, maybe even stored together with an up-to-date calendar. This is a possible explanation for a very unusual case that can account for almanacs being used so far beyond their apparently ephemeral use.

To conclude, the study of annotations in almanacs at the turn of the 20th century shows how, thanks to numerous factors like include mass education policies, writing and reading ceased to be separate practices in the lives of ordinary people. People who bought almanacs and read them also wrote on them. The wrote to plan actions, or, more frequently to reflect, and often to remember. Moreover, readers used almanacs as writing supports without the necessity of a calendar. Scholarly works on almanacs have often insisted on their ephemeral character, but going deeper into the collection and evaluation of annotations confirms the hypothesis that readers did not think the same, given that, for generations, such booklets represented the only contact common people had with forms of written knowledge and culture.

⁵⁸ L. BRAIDA, *Dall'almanacco all'agenda*, cit., p. 166.

⁵⁹ «Appuntam.o piazza della Libertà». Cf. item preserved at FB, call number BN 1/7.1911.