

Compiling Commercial Manuals as Means of Admiration for one's Profession: Pegolotti's "La Pratica della Mercatura"

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In North-Central Italy, merchants were leaders of society, engaged in long-distance rather than local trade, and were elite social group in the cities of in the late Middle Ages. However, they were criticized by their contemporaries from the point of view of ecclesiastical ethics because it was thought making a large profit is vice. This article examines the contents of a commercial manual, which were compiled by Florentine merchant Francesco Pegolotti in the 14th century, describes what characteristics the manual had, and argues that it was the way of admiring their own profession.

Pegolotti's manual was compiled and organized systematically by one merchant, therefore it is assumed that the author imagined his manual as one band. On the other hand, the author referred to other sources and its information was not updated in the later manuscript copy.

According to former studies, the Florentine manuals can be described as 'libro', books, in terms of their form, and Venetian ones as 'tariffa', tariffs. This article considers the social position of merchants in each city as a key factor for the differences in forms of manuals. While Venetian merchants belonged to the nobility or a high class and secured their social status, Florentine merchants did not enjoy the same status, nor did they have any support for the fame. This resulted in the Florentine manuals being compiled into one book. In the Middle Ages, books were considered as a sign of honor. Compiling the commercial manuals was the means with which the merchants showed ideal image of themselves as merchants.

The commercial manuals developed into academic books on commercial science, and the Pegolotti's manual could be considered as the first step toward the self-representation of the merchants as respectable and ethical members of medieval society.