

This synthetic biography is provisional because research on the life of Michel Agnolo Florio, “Fiorentino” said, are still ongoing.
(This text takes into account what has been observed over the research until March 2011)

Florio Michel Agnolo (Lucca, 1520? – London 1605?)

Scholar and humanist of the XVI century. On its origins have few personal items of him. We only know that the parents came from Messina exiles from the expulsion of Jewish families in 1492 under the edicts of the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. Parents nothing is know except that their little son Michel Agnolo was then entrusted to a convent of Franciscan friars in Florence, where he studied him.

For its qualities of character and commitment in the studies was given the task of preaching in the provinces of Tuscany. In 1535 was assigned to the convent of Siena, where the top was Bernardino Ochino, know preacher who later became general of the Capuchin Order. The following year he followed his boss Ochino in Naples during the visit in that capital city of emperor Charles V. The emperor was in visit to Naples returning from his expedition against the ottomans Turks in Tunis.

In Naples both had contacts with the Spanish reformer Juan dé Valdes, in which they were strongly affected. Since then their preaching in support of the Reformation had a large spreading in all Italian states and duchies.

While Ochino continued in its effort to disseminate new instances of Reform, Michel Angel reaches Messina to perfect his studies in Greek attending school in that city, founded by Constantine Lascaris, also known for bringing in Italy many tests of Greek literature and philosophy, saving them from destruction by the invasion of Ottoman empire.

Some sources report that was in that period of residence in Sicily that Michel Angel went to Athens where he gave courses in Greek and Roman history. In Greece probably he taken part in numerous expeditions in several monasteries and libraries, sent to retrieve the original texts of classic works of literature of the period held in those years by the Medici of Florence, the Marciana Academy in Venice and the Duchy of Milan, where the original and the Latin translations are now kept.

Back in Italy, he devoted himself with Ochino the dissemination of ideas of the Reformation especially within the cultural circles and the courts of the various Italian duchies.

At the same time he became interested in literature particularly the short stories of Boccaccio, Bandello and Cinzio in the period when in Italy was struggling in the “language question”. Then he participated in the debate on this very issue, and contrasted with Lodovico Castelvetro and Pietro Bembo for the supremacy of Tuscan spoken on other dialects.

In 1548 the Inquisition in Valtellina sought him as the author of a paper that, according to the inquisitors, offended the morals of Catholic Church. Finally he was arrested in date 1548 and shut up in Rome in the prisons of Tor di Nona, where he remained for 17 months. With the help of some supporters of Reformation, he was able to escape May 4, 1550. After having taken refuge with friends, he joined the Republic of Venice and from there, crossed the Alps, reached northern Europe.

On 1 November 1550 Michel Agnolo welcomed to London by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and his old brother Bernardino Ochino, who – also wanted by the Holy Office – had already been prosecuted in England in 1547.

Thanks to the estimate of Archbishop Cranmer and the protection of Sir William Cecil, Michel Agnolo got the job as a teacher of Italian language in the group of tutors that followed the educational attainment of children in the English court at the time when Edward VI, Jane Grey and Henry Herbert were still children (1550 – 1554).

Attending the royal court, in 1552 Michel Agnolo Florio married a lady of the staff of William Cecil, who bore him a son, which they gave the name of John.

Of those years are the first written grammar of the Italian language to the children. In March 1554, with the death of little Edward VI and the restoration of Catholicism by Queen Mary, Michel Agnolo, like many other foreign Protestant, refugee in England, leaving the island and settled in Trasburg together with the English friends J. Haddon and J. Banks. The following year, appreciated by count von Salis, a noble family in Chur, Grisons Switzerland, accepts the invitation to assume the position of pastor of Soglio (Bergel), located in the village he comes with his wife and little John on May 27, 1555.

In this country he remained until 1577, first as a pastor of the Protestant community of the Italian language and the last years as a notary in the valley. During all those years he alternated his pastoral work with the reorganization of his early literary works by collecting the books and notes taken during the years of his place in Italian literature.

The Soglio destination assured him the proximity to Valtellina, as well as duchy of Milan and to Venice, where many of his friends, writers, humanists and followers of de Valdes had been refugees. This is the case of Louis Castelvetro refugees in neighbouring of Chiavenna, The noblewoman Isabella Bresegna, literate, also in Chiavenna since 1561, the Augustinian Giulio della Rovere in Poschiavo, Celio Secondo Curione together Camillo Romano in Vicosoprano, all places where the Valtellina Reform had already levied.

When the child John got his primary education in 1565, the father sent him to Tübingen where he attended the local university to complete his training. He took courses in literature and foreign languages with the support of Pier Paolo Vergerio, who taught at that university. After the latter's death, the Vergerio family, close friend of his father, secured the continuation of studies of the young John in Germany.

In 1571 in England after the death of Queen Mary, the “Catholic” and the advent of Elizabeth, John Florio completed his cultural background and now an adult, he returned to England. At Oxford he enrolled in courses in English at Magdalene College.

Meanwhile at Soglio, Michel Agnolo involved in religious disputes by frequent theological disputes between the various Protestant Churches of that troubled period of history, leaving the pastoral ministry and has practiced as a notary in the valley. He devotes so with greater commitment to his literary works.

In 1577, Michel Agnolo Florio decided to return to England to be reunited with his son John.

Certain specific circumstances lead us to believe that he should have probably been in Venice at the meeting between Philip Sidney, his sister Mary, Countess of Bedford and her husband Sir Henry Herbert, Earl of Pembroke travelling in Italy, with the philosopher Giordano Bruno, which also came to Venice during his flight from Italy to Paris persecuted by the Inquisition. That meeting seems to have been prepared by John Florio, who had suggested to his friend Philip Sidney, also a student at Magdalene College in his early twenties. In those same days Philip Sidney was preparing to leave for Europe in the course of the mission in the Netherlands as a head of the League of Protestants.

His diplomatic mission included a visit to Paris and Venice just to coincide with the presence of Giordano Bruno in the latter city. It was therefore an opportunity for both Philip and Sir Pembroke, which would know that the philosopher was in Venice just in that period and at the same time also to let Sir Herbert to meet again Michel Agnolo Florio, his old teacher, after more than twenty years. He was in fact the Italian language teacher until early 1554, when the child Henry Herbert, four years old, lived together the young princesses Elizabeth and Jane Grey still confined by the half-sister Mary in the country residences of Hatfield and Cheshunt.

The meeting in Venice was certainly one of Philip Sidney and his family with the philosopher Bruno. Their occasional meeting was then followed up in England during the long stay of Giordano Bruno in London between 1583 and 1585, when the philosopher was himself a guest of the Herbert family in their residences Baynards Castle in the City and Wilton in the country.

With regard to the simultaneous presence of Michel Agnolo Florio in that meeting in Venice, there is no documentary evidence; but it is significant that immediately after that and the same year (1577) Florio leaves his home in Soglio, after twenty-two years, and moved permanently to London, carrying with him all his belongings and a large library of some 300 books and many manuscripts.

In 1581 John Florio is a professor of foreign languages at Oxford university and highlights as a translator in English of important works of European literature.

In 1583, as mentioned above, Giordano Bruno arrived in London as a consultant to aggregate a committee of experts sent by the French court of Henry III to assist the Ambassador in London, Mon. Mauvisière de Castelnau in the negotiations then under way for the drafting of the contract of marriage between Elizabeth and the French prince Francis of Anjou, young brother of the king of France. Start negotiations, prof. John Florio, who lived in Oxford, was hosted at the French Embassy during the years of negotiations, it means until 1585. It was precisely in that contest of collaboration with Giordano Bruno that John Florio learned from him that the philosopher considered his father Michel Agnolo as his own teacher.

Back in England, Michel Agnolo Florio may be reunited after so many years with his son John. Then starts the long period of sixteen years, during which they devote themselves to English translation of the many early works designed in Italy and at Soglio. John could not correctly translate the writings of his father without his support staff, considered the applicant's use of Italian regional dialects, idioms included in the numerous texts of the works. Preparatory work that the two Florio released in 1578 and subsequent years various literary works such as "First Fruits", "Second Fruits" on 1591 and "Worlds of Words" on 1598. This is the first English- Italian dictionary published in England.

Then works were intended to enable writers of England to understand the new forms of literary and linguistic expressions derived from a complex and erudite language more polished to apply to new works by British theatre enhanced with the addition of new words borrowed from Italian and Latin.

Meanwhile the two Florio come into contact with the young actor William Shakespeare, short time coming in London from Stratford, and not yet known, probably in the same place of common patrons (Henry Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Mr. Southampton). Nevertheless on 1593, when ending the epidemic of plague in London, reopened the theatres, and most of the works were ready for representation.

Some authors report that Michel Agnolo Florio died in London in 1605. In the last century journalist Santi Paladino said in his book that in the civil register of the City would include the death in that year that "Michel Agnolo Florio, eighty."