

The commercial archives of the Salviati bank of Lyons record the entire activity of one of the most important companies on the 16th century marketplace. They also keep information relative to other businessmen and companies on the European scene at the time. This thesis scrutinises the organisation, methods and main sectors of activity of the Salviati bank (exchange, finances and commodities trade) in the middle of the 16th century, at the height of Lyons' prosperity.

It examines mercantile practices in relation to economic spaces and underlines the reciprocal influence of Florentine mercantile traditions and Lyonese economic structures. More specifically, it shows how the involvement of Italian firms in Lyons shaped their choice of business organisation and trade objects and how the strategies of Italian businessmen impacted in turn on the functioning of the marketplace. While the study of the Lyonese branch of a Florentine firm allows to assess its adaptability to local economic structures, the analysis of the activity of the main actors on the Lyons marketplace sheds light on the economic and social processes essential to the good functioning of that marketplace (forms of collaboration between various economic operators and different levels of market integration). This leads to a questioning of many of the hypotheses formulated in the current historiography (mostly, on the basis of local sources), concerning the Italian dominion over Lyons, and a refutation of the vision of market organisation and changing economic conditions that it puts forward. The section devoted to the exchange business, the main field of specialisation of the Salviati bank at the time, challenges the notion of Lyon's key function in the European system of exchange. The uncovering of a previously unknown financial technique, and of techniques whose use in the space-time frame of this thesis is traditionally denied, brings an additional contribution to the history of banking.