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**Thomas Allison Kirk**. *Genoa and the Sea: Policy and Power in an Early Modern Maritime Republic (1559-1684).* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. 320 pp. $52.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-8083-4.

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**Genoa: The Other Maritime Republic**

This book seeks to expand our understanding of early modern Italy by focusing on a topic beyond the well-trod paths of Florentine and Venetian history. It examines Genoa's position in the Mediterranean world through a study of the republic's fleet-building activities and port policies between 1559 and 1684. Kirk finds that over the course of this period, Genoa gradually shifted from a position of intimacy with the Spanish crown to one of neutrality. The construction and maintenance of a fleet of state galleys (and later, galleons) was primarily a political and rhetorical phenomenon, especially during the first seventy years or so of this period. In practice, the republic's fleet guaranteed neither security nor commercial revival. On the other hand, the formulation of policies (beginning in the early seventeenth century) designed to open up Genoa as a "free port"–for Genoa this meant a warehousing and distribution center within Mediterranean trade circuits–experienced greater success, and should be understood in the context of Genoese disengagement from Spanish hegemony. Kirk's book quite successfully draws together many of the main themes in the scattered secondary literature on Genoese political history, constructing a framework that is buttressed with a broad range of references to administrative archives. *Genoa and the Sea* adds a welcome new Ligurian perspective to Anglophone scholarship on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy.

Kirk's book is organized in three main parts: a description of Genoese history and institutions until 1559 (chapters 1-2), a narrative of the debate over the construction and use of a state fleet between 1559 and 1684 (chapters 3-5), and an assessment of Genoese port policy during the seventeenth century.

The first chapter provides a brief history of the republic, discussing Andrea Doria's rearrangement of the Genoese political order into twenty-eight *alberghi*, which eventually resulted in the replacement of the old *popolari-nobili* factional split with a *vecchi-nuovi* one. Chapter 2 takes up the key role played by Genoa in the structure of Spanish dominion between roughly 1550 and 1630. As *vecchi* families began to increase their financial activities, they simultaneously changed their attitude toward the sea, abandoning shipping and ship-owning, though some Genoese continued to hold contracts with the Spanish crown that placed their galleys under the king's service. This chapter closes with a brief look at the Bank of San Giorgio, created in 1407 to consolidate the republic's debts in a process resulting in the alienation of most of the republic's sources of revenue to the bank's direct administration.

Chapters 3 through 5 take the reader through three phases of "policy development" concerning the state fleet. During the first phase, Genoa was a close ally of Spain, and Genoese bankers (from *vecchi* families) completely dominated royal finances. Relations between the states were based on the ability of the Doria family to continue to deliver a stable Genoese alliance (keeping Genoese politics under the control of the *vecchi*–who in turn benefited from privileged access to Spanish debt–was key to this arrangement) and the use of private Genoese galleys (also owned by *vecchi*) for Spanish service. Uberto Foglietta (in his *Della Repubblica di Genova*, 1559) and the *nobili* sharply criticized this state of affairs, pushing the republic to create a magistracy for state galleys (that could protect the raw silk that many *nobili* families imported from Sicily). After the civil war of 1575, *nuovi* and *vecchi* gradually merged into a single interest group. These Genoese elites sought protection for shipping lanes and grew to resent Spanish presumptions that the republic should automatically defer to crown demands in military and political affairs. Kirk sees the gradual dissolution of the Spanish alliance (chapter 4, covering the years 1607-1640) as a second phase in fleet policy development. The *vecchi* families began gradually to withdraw themselves from financial activities at court, and as their authority in Spain weakened, there was both less of an incentive on the part of the king to control Genoese politics so closely, and fewer reasons for Genoese elites to privilege the Spanish alliance. Territorial conflict with Spain (over places in Liguria) became part of a debate over "sovereignty over the seas," and when the republic made an official claim of royal status in 1637, it seemed obvious that a state fleet was necessary. For Kirk, fleet construction was driven not by merchants seeking a profit, but by political and rhetorical interests. The final phase of fleet policy played out after 1640, a period of "navalist predomination in Genoese politics" during which, ironically, the worlds of finance and maritime commerce were separate spheres for Genoese elites (p. 148). Genoese efforts to increase the republic's international profile were hampered by the 1656 plague outbreak that carried away half of the city's inhabitants. The republic's last galleon was sold in 1689 and Genoa left its maritime tradition behind, having failed to compete effectively with the Dutch.

Chapter 6 focuses on rules surrounding port traffic in Genoa, seeing these policies as a different facet of Genoa's relation to the sea. In the early 1590s Genoa declared itself a free port for grain, granting tax exemptions and safe passage to ships under certain conditions–a different notion of a "free port" from that operative in Livorno, which was designed to attract new resident foreign merchants. The Bank of San Giorgio proved willing to help bear expenses related to the free port, investing in the construction of the new breakwater (*molo nuovo*) in 1638-43. When, in 1654, Genoa permitted foreign merchants to take up residence port traffic increased, though Genoa remained unable to overtake Livorno's primary position as the key western Mediterranean port. Kirk finds that free port policy was not incompatible with naval armament, though on the whole the bank was more interested in the former (for fiscal reasons) and the Senate and other republican institutions in the latter (for political reasons).

Kirk concludes that fleet-building was an expression of the republic's political "drive to assert a certain notion of sovereignty and neutrality" (p. 187), but that free port policies were more effective tools for a "small, economically powerful state" like Genoa to pursue its interests. But the book also makes it clear that at different points in time, a range of groups defined the republic's interests in a variety of ways. It is not clear whether Kirk believes that the Genoese state, as a set of institutions, had some sort of essentialized matrix of interests.

It is strange that the history of the republic of Genoa, precisely during the period dubbed by Fernand Braudel as "the Genoese century," has received so little attention, especially in English-language scholarship. There has, however, been some exciting Italian scholarly production on early modern Genoa, led by Edoardo Grendi and his students (especially Osvaldo Raggio). Kirk does not engage the overall arguments made in this body of work, perhaps because his interests tend toward administrative history, while Grendi and Raggio focus on political and social relationships that are informally institutionalized (at best). But Kirk's useful synthesis and observations would have been strengthened by a direct confrontation with this work, whether Grendi's emphasis on the cultural and ethnographic context in which Genoese elites lived and acted, or Raggio's qualification of "la formastato genovese" as "un sistema di interazioni che riflettono le forme di organizzazione locale non meno che le iniziative del Principe."[1] Coming to terms with this sort of destabilization of what is meant by "the state" would have prevented Kirk from taking for granted what he means by "policy," and would have certainly deepened our understanding not only of Genoese maritime activity, but of early modern political practices and assumptions more generally.

What is clear is that the chief actor in this account is the republic, defined in an institutional sense, though occasionally the role of the Bank of San Giorgio is also mentioned. Aside from the Doria family (who function almost like unofficial viceroys for the Spanish crown for much of this period), the political agency of specific families or family groupings is not closely analyzed. The author, admitting that an examination of more "biographical material" and "the network of social and economic relationships" in which individual Genoese were involved would have been helpful, indicates that he intends to undertake this project in the future (p. xiii). If in this next book Kirk is able to provide (1) a provisional analysis of the specific commercial, financial, and political engagements of key individuals and families; and (2) a sketch of the networks into which these individuals and families organized themselves over time, this would be very good news indeed for scholars of the early modern Mediterranean.

Note

[1]. Edoardo Grendi, *I Balbi: Una famiglia genovese fra Spagna e Impero* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997); and Osvaldo Raggio, *Faide e parentele: Lo stato genovese visto dalla Fontanabuona* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), xxvi.

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